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ESTIMATE

OF THE

RELIGION

OF THE

FASHIONABLE WORLD.

BY ONE OF THE LAITY.

There was never found, in any age of the world, either Philoſophy, or Sect, or Religion, or Law, or Diſcipline, which did ſo highly exalt the public good as the Chriſtian Faith. Lord BACON.

THE FOURTH EDITION.

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AN ESTIMATE OF THE RELIGION OF THE FASHIONABLE WORLD.

By

THOMAS M. SLOAN

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AN

ESTIMATE

OF THE

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OF THE

FASHIONABLE WORLD.

INTRODUCTION.

THE general design of these pages is to offer some cursory remarks on the present state of religion among a great part of the polite and the fashionable; not only among that description of persons who, whether from disbelief, or whatever other cause, avowedly neglect the duties of Christianity; but among that more decent class also, who, while they acknowledge their belief of its truth by a public profession, and are not inattentive to any of its forms, yet exhibit little of its spirit in their general temper and conduct:

to ſhew that Chriſtianity, like its divine Author, is not only *denied* by thoſe who in words diſown their ſubmiſſion to its authority; but *betrayed* by ſtill more treacherous diſciples, even while they ſay, *Hail, Maſter!*

For this viſible declenſion of piety, various reaſons have been aſſigned, ſome of which however do not ſeem fully adequate to the effects aſcribed to them. The author of a late popular pamphlet * has accounted for the increaſed profligacy of the *common people*, by aſcribing it, very juſtly, to the increaſed diſſoluteneſs of their ſuperiors; and who will deny what he affirms—that the general conduct of high and low receives a deep tincture of depravity from the growing neglect of public worſhip? I muſt however take the liberty to diſſent from his opinion as to the cauſe of that neglect; and to ſuſpect that the too common deſertion of perſons of rank from the ſervice of the Eſtabliſhment is not occaſioned, in general, by their diſapprobation of the Liturgy; but that the far greater part them are deterred from going to church by motives far removed from ſpeculative objections and conſcientious ſcruples.

Far be it from me to enter the unpleaſant and boundleſs fields of controverſy; an enterprize for which it would be hard to ſay whether I have leſs ability or inclination. Far be it from me to ſtand forth the fierce champion of a Liturgy, or the prejudiced advocate of

* Hints to an aſſoc'ation, &c. &c,

forms and systems. A sincere member of the Establishment myself, I respect its institutions without idolatry, and acknowledge its imperfections without palliation.

But the difference of opinion here intimated is not so much about the Liturgy itself, as its imagined effects in thinning the pews of our people of fashion. The slightest degree of observation seems to contradict this assertion: those however who maintain the other opinion may satisfy their doubts, by enquiring whether the regular and systematic absenters from the church are chiefly to be found among the thinking, the reading, the speculative, and the scrupulous part of mankind.

Even the most negligent attendant on public worship must know, that the obnoxious creed, to whose malignant potency this general desertion is ascribed, is never read above three or four Sundays in the year; and that does not seem a very adequate reason for banishing the most scrupulous and tender consciences from church on the other eight-and-forty Sundays.

Besides, there is one test which is absolutely unequivocal—it is never read at all in the *afternoon*, any more than the Litany (another great source of offence); and yet, with all these multiplied reasons for their attendance, that is a season when the pews of the fashionable world are not *remarkable* for being crowded.

On the contrary, is it not pretty evident that the general quarrel (with ſome few exceptions) of thoſe who habitually abſent themſelves from public worſhip, is not with the Creed, but the Commandments? With ſuch, to reform the Prayer Book would go but a little way, unleſs the New Teſtament could be alſo abridged. Cut, and pare, and prune the ſervice of the Church ever ſo much, ſtill Chriſtianity itſelf will be found full of formidable objections. With ſuch objectors, it would avail but little that the Church ſhould give up her abſtruſe creeds, unleſs the Bible would expunge thoſe rigorous laws, which not only prohibit ſinful actions, but corrupt inclinations. And, to ſpeak honeſtly, I do not ſee how ſuch perſons as habitually infringe the laws of virtue and ſobriety, and who yet are men of acute ſagacity, accuſtomed on other ſubjects to a conſiſtent train of reaſoning; who ſee conſequences in their cauſes; who behold practical ſelf-denial neceſſarily involved in the ſincere habit of religious obſervances—I do not ſee how, to ſuch men, any doctrines reformed, any redundancies lopped, any obſcurities brightened, could effect this author's very benevolent and chriſtian wiſh.

For religious duties are often neglected upon more conſiſtent grounds than the friends of religion are willing to allow. They are often diſcontinued, not as repugnant to the underſtanding, not as repulſive to the judg-

ment, but as hostile to a licentious life. And when a prudent man, after entering into a solemn convention, finds that he is living in a constant breach of every article of the treaty he has engaged to observe; one cannot much wonder at his getting out of the hearing of the heavy artillery which he knows is planted against him, and against every one who lives in an allowed infraction of the covenant.

A man of sense, who should acknowledge the truth of the doctrine, would find himself obliged to submit to the force of the precept. Is it not easy to be a comfortable sinner, without trying, at least, to be a confirmed unbeliever. The smallest remains of faith would embitter a life of libertinism; and to him who retains any impression of Christianity, the wildest festivals of intemperance will be converted into the terrifying feast of Damocles: the suspended sword may every moment fall.

That many a worthy nonconformist is kept out of the pale of the Establishment by some of the causes noticed in the pamphlet in question, cannot be doubted; and that many candid members of that Establishment regret the causes which exclude the others, cannot be denied. But these are often sober thinkers, serious enquirers, conscientious reasoners; whose object is truth, and who spare no pains in search of what they take to *be* truth. But that the same objections banish the great

and the gay, is not equally evident. Thanks to the indolence and diſſipation of the times, it is not dogmas or doctrines, it is not abſtract reaſoning or puzzling propoſitions, it is not perplexed argument or intricate metaphyſics, which can now diſincline from Chriſtianity; ſo far from it, they cannot even allure to unbelief. Infidelity itſelf, with all that ſtrong and natural bias which paſſion and appetite have in its favour, if it appear in the grave and ſcholaſtic form of ſpeculation, argument, or philoſophical deduction, may lie almoſt as quietly on the ſhelf as its moſt able antagoniſt; and the cobwebs are almoſt as ſeldom bruſhed from Hobbes as from Hooker. No: prudent ſcepticiſm has wiſely ſtudied the temper of the times, and ſkilfully felt the pulſe of this relaxed and indolent age. It prudently accommodated itſelf to the reigning character, when it adopted ſarcaſm inſtead of reaſoning, and preferred a ſneer to an argument. It diſcreetly judged, that, if it would now gain proſelytes, it muſt ſhew itſelf under the bewitching form of a profane bonmot; muſt be interwoven in the texture of ſome amuſing hiſtory, written with the levity of a romance, and the point and glitter of an epigram: it muſt embelliſh the ample margin with ſome offenſive anecdote or impure alluſion, and decorate impiety with every looſe and mere tricious ornament of a corrupt imagination: it muſt break up the old flimſy ſyſtem into little miſchievous aphoriſms, rea-

dy for practical purpoſes: it muſt divide the rope of ſand into little portable parcels, which the ſhalloweſt wit can comprehend, and the ſhorteſt memory carry away.

Philoſophy therefore (as Unbelief, by a patent of its own creation, has lately been pleaſed to call itſelf) will not do nearly ſo much miſchief to the preſent age, as its great apoſtles intended: ſince it requires time, application, and patience to peruſe the reaſoning veterans of the ſceptic ſchool; and theſe are talents not now very ſeverely devoted to ſtudy of any ſort, by thoſe who give the law to faſhion; eſpecially ſince, as it was hinted above, the ſame principles may be acquired on cheaper terms, and the reputation of being philoſophers, obtained without the ſacrifices of pleaſure for the ſeverities of ſtudy; ſince the induſtry of our literary chymiſts has extracted the ſpirit from the groſs ſubſtance of the old unvendible poiſon, and exhibited it in the volatile eſſence of a few ſprightly ſayings.

If therefore, in this voluptuous age, when a frivolous and relaxing diſſipation has infected our very ſtudies, infidelity will not be at the pains of deep reſearch and elaborate inveſtigation, even on ſuch ſubjects as are congenial to its affections, it is vain to expect that chriſtianity will be more engaging, either as an object of ſpeculation, or a rule of practice, when its evidences require attention to be comprehended, its doctrines humility to be

received, and its precepts ſelf-denial to be embraced.

Will it then be uncharitable to pronounce, that the leading evil, not which thins our churches (for that is not the evil I propoſe to conſider) but which pervades our whole character, and gives the colour to our general conduct, is *practical irreligion?* an irreligion not ſo much oppoſed to a ſpeculative faith, as to that ſpirit, temper, and behaviour, which chriſtianity inculcates.

On this practical irreligion it is propoſed to offer a few hints. After attempting to ſhew, by a compariſon with the religion of the great in preceding ages, that there is a viſible decline of piety among the higher ranks —that even thoſe more liberal ſpirits who neglect not many of the great duties of benevolence, yet hold the ſeverer obligations of piety in no eſteem—I ſhall proceed, though perhaps with too little method, to remark on the notorious *effects* of the decay of this religious principle, as it corrupts our mode of education, infects our domeſtic conduct, ſpreads the contagion downwards among ſervants and inferiors, and influences our manners, habits, and converſation.

But what it is here propoſed principally to inſiſt on is, that this defect of religious principles is almoſt equally fatal, whether it appear in the open contempt of all ſacred inſtitutions, or under the more decent veil of external obſervances, unſupported by ſuch a

conduct as is analogous to the chriſtian profeſſion.

I ſhall proceed with a few remarks on a third claſs of faſhionable characters, who profeſs to acknowledge chriſtianity as a perfect ſyſtem of morals, while they deny its divine authority: and conclude with ſome ſlight animadverſions on the opinion which theſe maintain, that morality is the whole of religion.

It muſt be confeſſed, however, that manners and principles act reciprocally on each other; and are, by turns, cauſe and effect. For inſtance—the increaſed relaxation of morals, produces the increaſed neglect of infuſing religious principles in the education of youth: which effect becomes, in its turn, a cauſe; and in due time, when that cauſe comes to operate, helps on the decline of manners.

CHAP. I.

Decline of chriſtianity ſhewn by a comparative view of the religion of the great, in preceding ages.

IF the general poſition of this little tract be allowed, namely, that religion is at preſent in no very flouriſhing ſtate among thoſe, whoſe example, from the high ground on which they ſtand, guides and governs the reſt of mankind: it will not be denied by thoſe, who are ever ſo ſuperficially acquainted with the hiſtory of our country, that this has not always been the caſe. Thoſe who make a fair compariſon muſt allow, that however the preſent age may be improved in other important and valuable advantages, yet that there is but little appearance remaining among the great and the powerful of that "righteouſneſs which exalteth a nation;"—that there has been a *moral revolution* in the national manners and principles, very little analagous to that great *political* one of which we hear ſo much; that our public virtue bears little proportion to our public bleſſings, and that our religion had decreaſed in a pretty exact proportion to our having ſecured the means of enjoying it.

That the antipodes to wrong are hardly ever right, was very ſtrikingly illuſtrated about the middle of the laſt century, when the

fiery and indiscreet zeal of one party was made a pretext for the profligate impiety of the other; who, to the bad principle which dictated a depraved conduct, added the bad taste of being proud of it:—when even the least abandoned were absurdly apprehensive that an appearance of decency might subject them to the charge of fanaticism, a charge in which they took care to involve real piety as well as enthusiastic pretence; till it became the general fashion to avoid no sin but hypocrisy, to dread no imputation but that of seriousness, and to be more afraid of a good reputation than of every vice which ever earned a bad one.

It was not till piety was thus unfortunately brought into disrepute, that persons of condition thought it made their sincerity, their abilities or their good breeding questionable, to appear openly on the side of religion. A strict attachment of piety did not subtract from a great reputation. Men were not thought the worse lawyers, generals, ministers, legislators, or historians, for believing, and even defending, the religion of their country. The gallant Sir Philip Sidney, the rash but heroic Essex, the politic and sagacious Burleigh, the all accomplished Falkland*, not only publicly owned their belief

* Lord Falkland assisted the great Chillingworth in his incomparable work. The Religion of a Protestant.

in chriſtianity, but even wrote ſome things of a religious nature†. Theſe inſtances, and many others which might be adduced, are not, it will be allowed, ſelected from among contemplative recluſes, grave divines, or authors by profeſſion; but from buſy men of ſtrong paſſions, beſet with great temptations; diſtinguiſhed actors on the ſtage of life; and whoſe reſpective claims to the title of fine gentlemen, brave ſoldiers, or able ſtateſmen, have never been called in queſtion.

What would the Hales, and the Clarendons, and the Somers's* have ſaid, had they been told that the time was at no great diſtance, when that ſacred book, for which they thought it no derogation from their wiſdom or their dignity to entertain the profoundeſt reverence, would be of little more uſe to men in high public ſtations, than to be the inſtrument of an oath, and that the ſublimeſt rites of the chriſtian religion would ſoon be conſidered as little more than a neceſſary qualification for a place, or the legal preliminary to an office.

† See that equally elegant and authentic work, *The Anecdotes of Royal and Noble Authors.*

* This conſummate ſtateſman was not only remarkable for a ſtrict attendance on the public duties of religion, but for maintaining them with equal exactneſs in his family; at a period too, when religion was moſt diſcountenanced.

This indeed is the boasted period of free enquiry and liberty of thinking, and a noble subject of boasting it is. But it is the peculiar character of the present age, that its mischiefs often assume the most alluring forms: and that the most alarming evils not only look so like goodness, as to be often mistaken for it; but are sometimes mixed up with so much real good, as often to disguise, though never to counteract, their malignity. Under the beautiful mask of an enlightened philosophy, all religious restraints are set at nought; and some of the deadliest wounds have been aimed at christianity, in works written in avowed vindication of the most amiable of all the christian principles*. Even the prevalence of a liberal and warm philanthropy, is secretly sapping the foundation of christian morals, because many of its champions allow themselves to live in the open violation of the severer duties of justice and so-

* See particularly *Voltaire sur la Tolerance.* This is a common artifice of that engaging but insidious author. In this instance he has made use of the popularity he obtained in the fanatical tragedy at Thoulose (the murder of Calas) to discredit, though in the most guarded manner, christianity itself: degrading martyrdoms, denying the truth of the Pagan persecutions, &c. &c. And by mixing some truths with many falsehoods, by assuming by an amiable candour, and professing to serve the interests of goodness, he treacherously contrives to leave on the mind of the unguarded reader, impressions the most unfavouroble to christianity.

briety, while they are contending for the gentler ones of charity and beneficence.

The strong and generous bias in favour of universal toleration, noble as the principle itself is, has engendered a dangerous notion that all error is innocent. Whether it be owing to this, or to whatever other cause, it is certain that the discriminating features of the christian religion are every day growing into less repute; and it is become the fashion, even among the better sort, to evade, to lower, or to generalize, its most distinguishing peculiarities*.

Having wisely and happily freed ourselves from the trammels of human authority, are we not turning our liberty into licentiousness, and wantonly struggling to throw off the *divine* authority too? Freedom of thought is the glory of the human mind, while it is confined within its just and sober limits; but though we are accountable for *opinions* at no earthly tribunal, yet it should be remembered, that thoughts as well as actions are amenable to the bar of God: and though we may rejoice that

* There is so little of the author of christianity left in his own religion, that an apprehensive believer is ready to exclaim, with the woman at the sepulchre, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." The locality of Hell, and the existence of an evil Spirit, are annihilated, or considered as abstract ideas. They are never named without some periphrasis or circumlocution; as if the very names, instead of being awful and terrible, were only vulgar and illiberal.

the tyranny of the spiritual Procrustes is so far annihilated, that it is no longer thought a proof of the orthodoxy of one man's opinions, that he lop or lengthen those of another till they fit his own measure; yet there is still a standard by which not only actions are weighed, but opinions are judged, and every sentiment which is clearly inconsistent with the revealed will of God, is as much throwing off *his* dominion, as the breach of any of his moral precepts.

There is then surely one test by which it is no mark of intolerance to try the principles of men, namely, the *Law and the Testimony*: and it is impossible not to lament, that while a more generous spirit governs our judgment, a purer principle does not seem to regulate our lives. May it not be said, that while we are justly commended for thinking charitably of the opinions of others, we seem, in return, as if we were desirous of furnishing them with an opportunity of exercising their candour, by the laxity of principle in which we indulge ourselves? If the hearts of men are as firmly united to each other by the bond of charity, as some pretend, they could not fail of being united to God also, by one common principle of piety, the only certain source of all charitable judgment, as well as of all virtuous conduct.

Instead of abiding by the salutary precept of *judging no man*, it is the fashion to exceed our commission, and to fancy every body to

be in a ſafe ſtate. But, in forming our notions, we have to chooſe between the Bible and the world, between the rule and the practice. Where theſe do not agree, it is left to the judgment, of believers at leaſt, by which we are to decide. But we never act, in religious concerns, by the ſame rule of common ſenſe and equitable judgment which governs us on other occaſions. In weighing any commodity, its weight is determined by ſome generally-allowed ſtandard ; and if the commodity be heavier or lighter than the ſtandard weight, we add to or take from it : but we never break, or clip, or reduce the weight to ſuit the thing we are weighing ; becauſe the common conſent of mankind has agreed that the one ſhall be conſidered as the ſtandard to aſcertain the value of the other. But, in weighing our principles by the ſtandard of the Goſpel, we do juſt the reverſe. Inſtead of bringing our opinions and actions to the *balance of the ſanctuary*, to determine and rectify their comparative deficiencies, we lower and reduce the ſtandard of the ſcripture doctrines till we have accommodated them to our own purpoſes ; ſo that, inſtead of trying others and ourſelves by God's unerring rule, we try the truth of God's rule by its conformity or nonconformity to our own depraved notions and corrupt practices.

CHAP. II.

Benevolence allowed to be the reigning virtue, but not exclusively *the virtue of the present age. Benevolence not the whole of religion, though one of its most characteristic features. Whether benevolence proceed from a religious principle, will be more infallibly known by the general disposition of time, fortune, and the common habits of life, than from a few occasional acts of bounty.*

TO all the remonstrances and invectives of the preceding chapter, there will not fail to be opposed that which we hear every day so loudly insisted on—the decided superiority of the present age, in other and better respects. It will be said, that even those who neglect the outward forms of religion, exhibit however the best proofs of the best principles; that the unparalleled instances of charity, of which we are continual witnesses; that the many striking acts of public bounty, and the various new and noble improvements in this shining virtue, justly entitle the present age to be called, by way of eminence, *the age of benevolence.*

It is with the liveliest joy I acknowledge the delightful truth. Liberality flows with a full tide through a thousand chan-

nels. There is ſcarcely a newſpaper but records ſome meeting of men of fortune for the moſt ſalutary purpoſes. The noble and numberleſs ſtructures for the relief of diſtreſs, which are the ornament and the glory of our metropolis, proclaim a ſpecies of munificence unknown to former ages. Subſcriptions, not only to hoſpitals, but to various other valuable inſtitutions, are obtained almoſt as ſoon as ſolicited. And who but muſt wiſh that theſe beautiful monuments of benevolence may become every day more numerous, and more extended?

Yet with all theſe allowed and obvious excellencies, it is not quite clear whether ſomething too much has not been ſaid of the liberality of the preſent age, in a comparative view with that of thoſe ages which preceded it. A general alteration of habits and manners has at the ſame time multiplied public bounties and private diſtreſs; and it is ſcarcely a paradox to ſay, that there was probably leſs miſery when there was leſs munificence.

If an increaſed benevolence now ranges through, and relieves a wider compaſs of diſtreſs; yet ſtill if thoſe examples of luxury and diſſipation which promote that diſtreſs, are ſtill *more* increaſed, this makes the good done bear little proportion to the evil promoted. If the miſeries removed by the growth of charity fall, both in number and weight, far below thoſe which are cauſed by the growth of vice and diſorder; if we find, that though

bounty is extended, yet, that those corruptions which make bounty so necessary, are extended, also, almost beyond calculation; if it appear that though more objects are relieved by our money, yet incomparably more are debauched by our licentiousness—the balance perhaps will not turn out so decidedly in favour of the times as we are willing to imagine.

If then the most valuable species of charity is that which prevents distress by preventing or lessening vice, the greatest and most inevitable cause of want; we ought not so highly to exalt the bounty of the great in the present day, in preference to that broad shade of protection, patronage, and maintenance, which the wide-spread bounty of their forefathers stretched out over whole villages, I had almost said whole provinces. When a few noblemen in a county, like a few of their own stately oaks (paternal oaks! which are not often set upon a card), extended their sheltering branches to shield all the underwood of the forest—when there existed a kind of passive charity, a negative sort of benevolence, which did good of itself; and without effort, exertion, or expence, performed the best functions of bounty, though it did not aspire to the dignity of its name—it was simply this:—great people staid at home; and the sober pomp, and orderly magnificence of a noble family, residing at their own castle great part of the year, con-

tributed in the moſt natural way to the maintenance of the poor; and in a good degree prevented that diſtreſs, which it muſt however be thankfully confeſſed it is the laudable object of modern bounty to relieve. A man of fortune might not then, it is true, ſo often dine in public, for the benefit of the poor; but the poor were more regularly and comfortably fed with the abundant crumbs which then fell from the rich man's table. Whereas it cannot be denied that the prevailing mode of living has pared real hoſpitality to the very quick: and, though the remark may be thought ridiculous, it is a material diſadvantage to the poor, that the introduction of the modern ſtyle of luxury has rendered the remains of the moſt coſtly table but of ſmall value.

But even allowing the boaſted ſuperiority of modern benevolence, ſtill it will not be inconſiſtent with the object of the preſent deſign, to enquire whether the diffuſion of this branch of charity, though the moſt lovely offſpring of religion, be yet any poſitive proof of the prevalence of religious principles: and whether it is not the faſhion rather to conſider benevolence as a ſubſtitute for chriſtianity, than as an evidence of it.

For it ſeems to be one of the reigning errors among the better ſort, to reduce all religion into benevolence, and all benevolence into alms-giving. The wide and comprehenſive idea of chriſtian charity is compreſſed

into the slender compass of a little pecuniary relief. This species of benevolence is indeed a bright gem among the ornaments of a christian; but by no means furnishes all the jewels of his crown, which derives its lustre from the associated radiance of every christian grace. Besides, the genuine virtues are all of the same family; and it is only by being seen in company with each other, and with Piety their common parent, that they are certainly known to be legitimate, for there are such things as even spurious virtues.

But is this the property of the *christian* virtues, that, like all other amiable members of the same family, while each is doing its own particular duty, it is contributing to the prosperity of the rest; and the larger the family the better they live together, as no one can advance itself without labouring for the advancement of the whole: thus, no man can be benevolent on christian principles, without self-denial; and so of the other virtues: each is connected with some other, and all with religion.

I already anticipate the obvious and hackneyed reply, that "whoever be the instrument, and whatever be the motive of bounty, still the poor are equally relieved, and therefore the end is the same." And it must be confessed, that those compassionate hearts, who cannot but be earnestly anxious that the distressed should be relieved at any rate, should not too scrupulously enquire into any

cauſe of which the effect is ſo beneficial. Nor indeed will candour ſcrutinize too curiouſly into the errors of any life, of which benevolence will always be allowed to be a ſhining ornament, while it does not pretend to be an atoning virtue.

Let me not be miſrepreſented, as if I were ſeeking to detract from the value of this amiable feeling; one does not ſurely lower the practice by ſeeking to ennoble the principle; the action will not be impaired by mending the motive: and no one will be likely to give the poor leſs, becauſe he ſeeks to pleaſe God more.

One cannot then help wiſhing that pecuniary bounty were not only practiſed, but ſometimes enjoined too, as a redeeming virtue. In many converſations, I had almoſt ſaid in many charity ſermons, it is inſinuated as if a little alms-giving could pay off old ſcores contracted by favourite indulgences. This, though often done by well-meaning men to advance the intereſts of ſome preſent pious purpoſe, yet has the miſchievous effect of thoſe medicines which while they may relieve a local complaint, are yet undermining the general habit.

That great numbers who are not influenced by ſo high a principle as chriſtianity holds out, are yet truly compaſſionate, without hypocriſy, and without oſtentation, who can doubt? ſince there are by nature many tender hearts; for did not God make them?

and is he not the Author of all that is good in nature, as well as in grace?

But who that feels the beauty of benevolence, can avoid being solicitous, not only that its offerings should comfort the receiver, but return in blessings to the bosom of the giver, by springing from such motives, and being accompanied by such a temper as shall redound to his eternal good? For that the benefit is the same to the object, whatever be the character of the benefactor, is but an uncomfortable view of things to a real christian, whose compassion reaches to the souls of men. Such an one longs to see the charitable giver as happy as he is endeavouring to make the object of his bounty; but such an one knows that no happiness can be fully and finally enjoyed but on the solid basis of christian piety.

For as religion is not, on the one hand, merely an opinion or a sentiment; so neither is it, on the other, merely an act or a performance, but it is a disposition, a habit, a temper: it is not a name, but a nature: it is a turning the whole mind to God; a concentration of all the powers and affections of the soul into one steady point, an uniform desire to please *Him*. This desire will naturally and necessarily manifest itself, in our doing all the good we can to our fellow-creatures in every possible way; for it will be found that neither of the two parts into which practical religion is divided, can be performed with any degree of perfection but by those who

unite both: as it may be queſtioned if any man really *does* "love his neighbour as himſelf," who does not firſt endeavour to "love God with all his heart." As genius has been defined to be ſtrong general powers of mind accidentally determined to ſome particular purſuit; ſo piety may be denominated a ſtrong general diſpoſition of the heart to every thing that is right, breaking forth into every excellent action, as the occaſion preſents itſelf. The temper muſt be ready in the mind, and the whole heart muſt be prepared and trained to every act of virtue to which it may be called out. For religious principles are like the military exerciſe; they keep up an habitual ſtate of preparation for actual ſervice; and by never relaxing the diſcipline, the real chriſtian is ready for every duty to which he may be commanded. Right actions beſt prove the exiſtence of religion in the heart; but they are evidences, not cauſes.

Whether therefore a man's charitable actions proceed from religious principle, he will be beſt able to aſcertain by ſcrutinizing into what is the general diſpoſition of his time and fortune; and by attending to ſuch an habitual regulation of his pleaſures and expences as will enable him to be more or leſs uſeful to others.

For it is in vain that he may poſſeſs, what is called by the courteſy of faſhion *the beſt heart in the world* (a character we every day hear applied to the libertine and the prodi-

gal), if he squander his time and estate in such a round of extravagant indulgences, and thoughtless dissipation, as leaves him little money and less leisure for nobler purposes. It makes but little difference whether a man is prevented from doing good by hard-hearted parsimony or an unprincipled extravagance; the stream is equally cut off.

The mere *casual* benevolence of any man can have little claim to solid esteem; nor does any charity deserve the name which does not grow out of a steady conviction that it is his bounden duty, which does not spring from a settled propensity to obey the whole will of God; which is not therefore made a part of the general plan of his conduct; and which does not lead him to order the whole scheme of his affairs with an eye to it.

He therefore who does not habituate himself to certain interior restraints, who does not live in a regular course of self-renunciation, will not be likely often to perform acts of beneficence, when it becomes necessary to convert to such purposes any of that time or money which appetite, temptation or vanity solicit him to divert to other purposes.

And surely he who seldom sacrifices one darling indulgence, who does not subtract one gratification from the incessant round of his enjoyments, when the indulgence would obstruct his capacity of doing good, or when the sacrifice would enlarge his power, does not deserve the name of benevolent. And

such an unequivocal criterion of charity to whom are we to look, but to the conscientious christian? No other spirit but that by which he is governed, can subdue self-love: and where self-love is the predominant passion, benevolence can have but a feeble, or an accidental dominion.

Now if we look around and remark the excesses of luxury, the costly diversions, and the intemperate dissipation in which numbers of professing christians indulge themselves, can any stretch of candour, can even that tender sentiment by which we are enjoined "to hope" and to "believe all things," enable us to hope and believe that such are actuated by a spirit of christian benevolence, merely becaufe we see them perform some casual acts of charity, which the spirit of the world can contrive to make extremely compatible with a voluptuous life, and the cost of which, after all, bears but little proportion to that of any one vice, or even vanity?

Men will not believe that there is hardly any one human good quality which will know and keep its proper bounds, without the restraining influence of religious principle. There is, for instance, great danger lest a constant attention to so right a practice as an invariable œconomy should incline the heart to the love of money. Nothing can effectually counteract this natural propensity, but the christian habit of devoting those retrenched expences to some good purpose; and then

œconomy, instead of narrowing the heart, will enlarge it, by inducing a constant association of benevolence with frugality. An habitual attention to the wants of others, is the only wholesome regulator of our own expences, and carries with it a whole train of virtues, disinterestedness, sobriety, and temperance. And those who live in the custom of levying constant taxes on their vanities for such purposes, serve the poor still less than they serve themselves, by cultivating such habits as make the best qualification for their final happiness.

Thus when a vein of christianity runs through the whole mass of a man's life, it gives a new value to all his actions, and a new character to all his views. It transmutes prudence and œconomy into christian virtues; and every offering that is presented on the altar of charity, becomes truly consecrated, when it is the gift of obedience, and the price of self-denial. Piety is the fire from heaven, which can alone kindle the sacrifice, and make it acceptable.

On the other hand, when any act of bounty is performed by way of composition with one's Maker, either as a purchase, or an expiation of unallowed indulgences; though even in this case, God, (who makes all the passions of men subservient to his good purposes) can make the gift equally beneficial to the receiver; yet it is surely not too severe to say, that to the giver such acts are an unfounded dependance, a deceitful refuge, a broken staff.

CHAP. III.

The neglect of religious education both a cause and consequence of the decline of christianity. No moral restraints—Religion only incidentally taught, not as a principle of action. A few of the causes which dispose the young to entertain low opinions of religion.

LET not the truly serious be offended, as if, in the present chapter, which is intended to treat of the notorious neglect of religious education, I meant to confine the spirit of christianity to merely mechanical effects, and to suppose that piety must be the natural and inevitable consequence of early institution. To imply this, would be indeed to betray a lamentable ignorance of human nature, of the disorder sin has introduced, of the inefficacy of human means, and entirely to mistake the genius of our religion. It would be to suppose that God was to depend upon *our* goodness, and not upon *his*.

Yet it must be allowed that the Supreme Being works chiefly by means; and though it is confessed that no defect of education, no corruption of manners, can place any one out of the reach of the divine influences (for it is under such circumstances, perhaps, that the most extraordinary instances of divine grace have been manifested); yet it must be

owned, that early sobriety, early knowledge of religion, and early habits of piety, are the most probable means of securing the favour of God. To acquire these, is putting ourselves in the way in which he himself has told us his blessing is to be found.

But religion is the only thing in which we seem to look for the end, without making use of the means: and yet, it would not be more surprising if we were to expect that our children should become artists and scholars, without being bred to arts and languages, than it is to look for a christian world, without a christian education.

The noblest objects can yield no delight, if there be not in the mind a disposition to enjoy them, arising from an intelligence of their nature, and a reverence for their value, which can only spring from long habit and early acquaintance. For to produce any capacity of enjoyment, there must be a congruity between the mind and the object. To the mathematician demonstration is pleasure; to the philosopher the study of nature; to the voluptuous the gratification of his appetite; to the poet the pleasures of his imagination. These objects they all respectively pursue as their proper business, as pleasures adapted to that part of their nature which they have been accustomed to indulge and cultivate.

Now, as men will be apt to act consistently with their general views and habitual tendencies, would it not be absurd to expect that

the philoſopher ſhould look for his ſovereign good at a ball, or the ſenſualiſt in the pleaſures of intellect or piety? None of theſe ends are anſwerable to the general views of the reſpective purſuer; they are not correſponding to his ideas; they are not commenſurate to his aims. The ſublimeſt pleaſures can afford little gratification where a previous taſte has not been cultivated. A clown, who ſhould hear a ſcholar or an artiſt talk of the delights of a library, a picture gallery, or a concert, could not gueſs at the nature of the pleaſures they afford, nor would his being introduced to them give him much clearer ideas, becauſe he would bring to them an eye blind to proportion, an underſtanding new to ſcience, and an ear deaf to harmony.

Shall we expect then, ſince men can only be ſcholars by ſedulous labour, that they ſhall be chriſtians by mere chance? Shall we be ſurpriſed if thoſe do not fulfil the offices of religion, who are not trained to an acquaintance with them? And will it not be obvious, that it muſt be ſome other thing beſides the abſtruſeneſs of creeds and opinions, which makes chriſtianity unfaſhionable?

For it will not probably be diſputed, that in no age have the paſſions of youth been ſo early freed from the *muzzle of reſtraint;* in no age has the paternal authority been ſo contemptuouſly treated, or every ſpecies of ſubordination ſo diſdainfully trampled on. All the ſhades of diſcrimination in ſociety

seem to be melting into each other. In no age has imprudent fondness been so injuriously lavish, or the supernumerary expenses of the college and the school (that prolific seed of corruption) been so prodigally augmented. In no age have the appetites been excited by such early stimulants, and anticipated by such premature indulgences. Never was the shining gloss, the charming novelty of life so early worn off from all enjoyment by excessive use. Never had simple, and natural, and youthful pleasures so early lost their power over the mind; nor was ever one great secret of virtue and happiness the secret of being cheaply pleased, so little understood.

A taste for costly, or artificial, or tumultuous pleasures cannot be gratified, by their most sedulous pursuers, at every moment; and what wretched management is it in the œconomy of human happiness so to contrive, as that the enjoyment shall be rare and difficult, and the intervals long and languid! Whereas real and unadulterated pleasures occur perpetually to him who cultivates a taste for truth and nature, and science and virtue. But these simple and tranquil enjoyments cannot but be insipid to him, whose passions have been prematurely excited by agitating pleasures, or whose taste has been depraved by such as are debasing and frivolous; for it is of more consequence to virtue than some good people are willing to allow, to preserve

the taſte pure, and the judgment ſound. A vitiated intellect has no ſmall connection with depraved morals.

Since amuſements of ſome kind are neceſſary to all ages (I ſpeak now with an eye to mere human enjoyment), why ſhould it not be as proper to tether men as other animals ? Why ſhould not he too be confined, in different ſtages of life, to certain reſtricted limitations ? ſince nothing but experience ſeems to teach him, that if he be allowed to anticipate his future poſſeſſions, and trample all the flowery fields of real, as well as imaginary and artificial enjoyment, he not only induces preſent diſguſt, but defaces and deſtroys all the rich materials of his future happineſs ; and leaves himſelf, for the reſt of his life, nothing but ravaged fields and barren ſtubble.

But the great and radical defect, and that which comes more immediately within the preſent deſign, ſeems to be, that in general the characteriſtical principles of chriſtianity are not early and ſtrongly infuſed into the mind : that religion is rather taught incidentally, as a thing of ſubordinate value, than as the leading principle of human actions, and the great animating ſpring of human conduct. Were the high influential principles of the chriſtian religion anxiouſly and early inculcated, we ſhould find that thoſe lapſes from virtue, to which paſſion and

temptation afterwards too frequently solicit, would be more easily recoverable.

For though the evil propensities of fallen nature, and the bewitching allurements of pleasure, will too often seduce even those of the best education into devious paths, yet we shall find that men will seldom be *incurably* wicked, without that internal corruption of principle, which knows how to justify iniquity, and confirm evil conduct, by the sanction of corrupt reasoning.

The errors occasioned by the violence of passion may be reformed, but systematic wickedness will be only fortified by time; and no decrease of strength, no decay of appetite, can weaken the power of a pernicious principle. He who commits a wrong action indeed, puts himself out of the path of safety; but he who adopts a false principle, not only throws himself into the enemy's country, but burns the ships, breaks the bridge, cuts off every retreat by which he might hope one day to return into his own.

Surely it will subject no one to the imputation of bigotry or enthusiasm, if he venture to enquire whether the genuine doctrines of christianity are made the standard by which our young men of fashion are commonly taught to try their principles, or to weigh their actions; or whether some more popular standard, of custom, or fashion, or worldly opinion, be not too frequently allowed to supersede them? Whether some idol of

falſe honour be not conſecrated for them to worſhip? Whether even among the better ſort, reputation be not held out as a motive of ſufficient energy to produce virtue, in a world where yet the greateſt vices are every day practiſed openly, which do not at all obſtruct the reception of thoſe who practiſe them into the beſt company? Whether reſentment be not ennobled, and pride, and many other paſſions, erected into honourable virtues—virtues not leſs repugnant to the genius and ſpirit of chriſtianity, than obvious groſs vices? Will it be thought impertinent to enquire if the awful doctrines of a perpetually preſent Deity, and a future righteous judgment, are early impreſſed, and laſtingly engraven, on the hearts and conſciences of our high-born youth?

Perhaps, if there be any one particular in which we fall remarkably below the politer nations of antiquity, it is in that part of education which has a reference to purity of mind and the diſcipline of the heart.

For the great ſecret of religious education, and which ſeems baniſhed from the preſent practiſe, conſiſts in training young men to an habitual interior reſtraint, an early goverment of the affections, and a courſe of ſelf-controul over thoſe tyrannizing inclinations, which have ſo natural a tendency to enſlave the human heart. Without this habit of moral reſtraint, which is one of the fundamental laws of chriſtian virtue, though men may, from na-

tural temper, often *do* good, yet it is perhaps impossible that they should ever *be* good. Without the vigorous exercise of this controuling principle, the best dispositions, and the most amiable qualities, will go but a little way towards establishing a virtuous character. For the best dispositions will be easily overcome by the concurrence of passion and temptation, in a heart where the passions have not been accustomed to this wholesome discipline: and the most amiable qualities will but more easily betray their possessor, unless the yielding heart be fortified by repeated acts, and long habits, of resistence.

In this, as in various other instances, we may blush at the superiority of Pagan institution. Were the Roman youth taught to imagine themselves always in the awful presence of Cato, in order to habituate them betimes to suppress base sentiments, and to excite such as were generous and noble? And should not the christian youth be continually reminded, that a greater than Cato is here? Should they not be trained to the habit of acting under the constant impression, that *He* to whom they must one day be accountable for intentions, as well as words and actions, is witness to the one as well as the other; that he not only is "about their paths," but "understands their very thoughts?"

Were the disciples of a Pagan* leader taught that it was a motive sufficient to compel their

* Pythagoras.

obedience to any rule, whether they liked it or not, that it had the authority of their teacher's name? were the bare words, *the maſter hath ſaid it*, ſufficient to ſettle all diſputes, and to ſubdue all reluctance? And ſhall the ſcholars of a more divine teacher, who have a code of laws written by God himſelf, be contented with a lower rule, or abide by a meaner authority? And is any argument drawn from human conſiderations likely to operate more forcibly on a dependant being, than that ſimple but grand aſſertion, with which ſo many of the precepts of our religion are introduced—Becauſe, THUS SAITH THE LORD?

For it is doing but little, in the infuſion of firſt principles, to obtain the bare aſſent of the underſtanding to the exiſtence of one Supreme Power, unleſs the heart and affections go along with the conviction, by our conceiving of that power as intimately connected with ourſelves. A feeling temper will be but little affected with the cold idea of a *geometrical* God, as the excellent Paſcal expreſſes it, who merely adjuſts all the parts of matter, and keeps the elements in order. Such a mind will be but little moved, unleſs he be taught to conſider his Maker under the intereſting and endearing repreſentation which revealed religion gives of him. That "God is," will be to him rather an alarming than a conſolatory idea; till he be perſuaded of the ſubſequent propoſition, that "he is the rewarder of all ſuch as diligently ſeek him." Nay if natu-

ral religion does even acknowledge one, awful attribute, that "God is just;" it will only increase the terror of a tender conscience, till he learn, from the fountain of truth, that he is, "the justifier of all who believe on him."

But if the great sanctions of our religion are not deeply engraven on the heart, where shall we look for a more adequate curb to the fiery spirit of youth? For, let the elements be ever so kindly mixed in human composition, let the natural temper be ever so amiable, still whenever a man ceases to think himself an accountable being, what motive can he have for resisting a strong temptation to a present good, when he has no dread that he shall thereby forfeit a greater future good?

But it will be objected, that this deep sense of religion would interfere with the general purposes of education, which is designed to qualify men for the business of human life, and not to train up a race of monks and ascetics.

There is however so little real solidity in this specious objection, that I am firmly persuaded, that if religious principles were more deeply impressed on the heart, even the things of this world would be much better carried on. For where are we to look for so much punctuality, diligence, application, doing every thing in its proper day (the great hinge on which business turns), as among men of principle? Oeconomy of time,

truth in obſerving his word, never daring to deceive or to diſappoint—theſe are the very eſſence of a man of buſineſs; and for theſe to whom ſhall we moſt naturally look? Who is ſo little likely to be "ſlothful in buſineſs," as he who is "fervent in ſpirit?" Will not he be moſt regular in dealing with men, who is moſt diligent in "ſerving the Lord?"

But it may be ſaid, allowing that religion does not neceſſarily ſpoil a man of *buſineſs*, yet it would effectually defeat thoſe accompliſhments, and counteract that fine breeding, which eſſentially conſtitute the *gentleman*.

This again is ſo far from being a natural conſequence, that, ſuppoſing all the other real advantages, of parts and education, to be equally taken into the account, there is no doubt but that, in point of true politeneſs, a real chriſtian would beat the world at its own weapons, the world itſelf being judge.

For though it muſt be confeſſed, that, in the preſent ſtate of things, other wickedneſs has made diſſimulation neceſſary; and that being the caſe, there is ſcarcely any one invention for which we are more obliged to mankind than for that of politeneſs, as there is perhaps no ſcreen in the world which hides ſo many ugly ſights: yet while we allow that there never was ſo admirable a ſupplement to real goodneſs, as good breeding; it is however certain that the principles of chriſtianity put into action, would neceſſarily pro-

duce more genuine politeness than any maxims drawn from motives of human vanity or convenience. If *love*, *peace*, *joy*, *long-suffering*, *gentleness*, *patience*, *goodness*, and *meekness*, may be thought instruments to produce sweetness of manners, these we are expressly told are "the fruits of the spirit." If mourning with the afflicted, rejoicing with the happy, if "to esteem others better than ourselves;" if "to take the lowest room;" if "not to seek our own;" if "not to behave ourselves unseemly;" if "not to speak great swelling words of vanity"—if these are amiable, engaging and polite parts of behaviour; then would the documents of Saint Paul make as true a fine gentleman as the *Courtier of Castiglione*, or even the *Letters of Lord Chesterfield* himself. Then would simulation, and dissimulation, and all the nice shades and delicate gradations of passive and active deceit, be rendered superfluous; and the affections of every heart be won by a shorter and a surer way, than by the elegant obliquities of this late popular preceptor; whose mischiefs have outlived his reputation; and who, notwithstanding the present just declension of his fame, has helped to relax the general nerve of virtue, and has left a taint upon the public morals, of which we are still sensible.

That self-abasement then, which is inseparable from christianity, and the external signs of which good breeding knows so well

how to assume; and those charities which suggest invariable kindness to others, even in the smallest things, would, if left to their natural workings, produce that gentleness which it is one great object of a polite education to imitate. They would produce it too without effort and without exertion; for being inherent in the substance, it would naturally produce itself on the surface.

For however useful the institutions of polished society may be found, yet they can never alter the eternal difference between right and wrong; or convert appearances into realities; they cannot transform decency into virtue nor make politeness pass for principle. And the advocates for fashionable breeding, should be humbled to reflect, that every convention of artificial manners was invented not to *cure*, but to *conceal*, deformity: that though the superficial civilities of elegant life, tend to make this corrupt world a more tolerable place than it would be without them; yet they never will be considered as a substitute for truth and virtue by HIM who is to pass the definitive sentence on the characters of men.

Among the many prejudices which the young and the gay entertain against religion, one is, that it is the declared enemy to wit and genius. But, says one of its wittiest champions*, "Piety enjoins no man to be dull:" and it

* Dr. South

will be found, on a fair enquiry, that though it cannot be denied that irreligion has had able men for its advocates, yet they have never been the most able. Nor can any learned profession, any department in letters or in science, produce a champion on the side of unbelief but christianity has still a greater name to oppose it; philosophers themselves being judges.

But while the young adopt an opinion, from one class of writers, that religious men are weak; they acquire, from another, a notion that they are ridiculous: andthis opinion, by mixing itself with their common notions, and deriving itself from their very amusements, is the more mischievous as it is received without resistance or suspicion.

One common medium through which they take this false view is, those favourite works of wit and humour, so captivating to youthful imaginations, were no small part of the author's success perhaps has been owing to his dexterously introducing a pious character, with so many virtues, that it is impossible not to love him, yet tinctured with so many absurdities, that it is impossible not to laugh at him. The reader's memory will furnish him with too many instances of what is here meant. The slightest touches of a witty malice can make the best character ridiculous. It is effected by any little awkwardness, absence of mind, an obsolete phrase, a formal pronunciation, a peculiarity of gesture. Or if such a character be brought,

by unſuſpecting goodneſs, and truſting honeſty, into ſome fooliſh ſcrape, it will ſtamp an impreſſion of ridicule ſo indelible, that all his worth ſhall not be able to efface it: and the young who do not always ſeparate their ideas very carefully, ſhall ever after, by this early and falſe aſſociation, conceive of piety as having ſomething eſſentially ridiculous in itſelf.

But one of the moſt infallible arts, by which the inexperienced are engaged on the ſide of irreligion, is, that popular air of candour, good nature, and toleration, which it ſo invariably puts on. While, on the one hand, ſincere piety is often accuſed of moroſeneſs and ſeverity, becauſe it cannot hear the doctrines, on which it founds its eternal hopes, derided without emotion; indifference or unbelief, on the other hand, purchaſe the praiſe of candour at an eaſy price, becauſe they neither ſuffer grief, nor expreſs indignation, at hearing the moſt awful truths ridiculed, or the moſt ſolemn obligations ſet at nought.

The ſcoffers whom young people hear talk, and the books they hear quoted, falſely charge their own injurious opinions on chriſtianity, and then unjuſtly accuſe her of being the monſter they have made. They dreſs her up, with the ſword of perſecution in one hand, and the flames of intolerance in the other; and then ridicule the ſober-minded for worſhipping an idol which their miſrepreſentation has rendered as malignant as Moloch. In the mean time they affect

to seize on benevolence with exclusive appropriation as their own cardinal virtue, and to accuse of a bigotted cruelty, that narrow spirit which points out the perils of licentiousness, and the terrors of a future account. And yet this benevolence, with all its tender mercies, is not afraid nor ashamed to endeavour at snatching away from humble piety, the comfort of a present hope, and the bright prospect of a felicity that shall have no end. It does not however seem a very probable means of adding to the stock of human happiness, by plundering mankind of that principle, by the destruction of which friendship is robbed of its bond, society of its security, patience of its motive, morality of its foundation, integrity of its reward, sorrow of its consolation, life of its balm, and death of its support.

It will not perhaps be one of the meanest advantages of a better state, that as the will shall be reformed, so the judgment shall be rectified; that "evil shall no more be called good," nor the "churl liberal;" nor the plunderer of our best possession, our principles, benevolent. Then it will be evident that greater violence could not be done to truth and language, than to wrest benevolence from christianity, her most appropriate and peculiar attribute. If benevolence be "good-will to men," it was that which angelic messengers were not thought too high to announce, nor a much higher being than angels to teach by his precepts, and to illustrate by his death:

it was the criterion, the very watch-word as it were, by which he intended his religion and his followers ſhould be diſtinguiſhed. "By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples if ye love one another." Beſides, it is the very genius of chriſtianity to extirpate all ſelfiſhneſs, on whoſe vacated ground, benevolence naturally and neceſſarily plants itſelf.

But not to run through all the particulars which obſtruct the growth of piety in young perſons, I ſhall only name one more. They hear much declamation from the faſhionable reaſoners, againſt the contracted and ſelfiſh ſpirit of chriſtianity—that it is of a ſordid temper, works for pay, and looks for reward.

But this jargon of French philoſophy, which prates of pure diſintereſted goodneſs acting for its own ſake, and equally deſpiſing puniſhment and diſdaining recompence, indicates as little knowledge of human nature as of chriſtian revelation, when it addreſſes man as a being made up of pure intellect, without any mixture of paſſions, and who can be made happy without hope, and virtuous without fear.

A creature hurried away by the impulſe of ſome impetuous inclination, is not likely to be reſtrained (if he be reſtrained at all) by a cold reflection on the beauty of virtue. If the dread of offending God, and the incurring his everlaſting diſpleaſure, cannot ſtop

him, how ſhall a weaker motive do it? When we ſee that the powerful ſanctions which religion holds out, are too often an ineffectual curb: to think of attaining the ſame end by feebler means, is as if one ſhould expect to make a watch go the better by breaking the main ſpring; nay, as abſurd as if the philoſopher who inculcates the doctrine, ſhould undertake with one of his fingers to lift an immenſe weight, which had reſiſted the powers of the crane and the lever.

On calm and temperate ſpirits, indeed, in the hour of retirement, in the repoſe of the paſſions, in the abſence of temptation, virtue does ſeem to be her own adequate reward; and very lovely are the fruits ſhe bears, in preſerving health, credit, and fortune. But on how few will this principle act! and even on them, how often will its operation be ſuſpended! and though virtue for her own ſake, might have captivated often hearts, which almoſt ſeem caſt in a natural mould of goodneſs; yet no motive could, at all times, be ſo likely to reſtrain even theſe, under the preſſure of temptation, as this ſimple aſſertion —*For all this God will bring me into judgment.*

But it is the beauty of our religion, that it is not held out excluſively to a few ſelect ſpirits; that it is not an object of ſpeculation or an exerciſe of ingenuity, but a *rule of life*, ſuited to every condition, capacity, and temper. It is the glory of the chriſtian re-

ligion to *be*, what it was, the glory of every pagan inſtitution *not* to be, the *religion of the people*; and that which conſtitutes its characteriſtic value, is its ſuitableneſs to the genius, condition, and neceſſities of all mankind.

For with whatever obſcurities it has pleaſed God to ſhadow ſome parts of his written word, yet he has graciouſly ordered, that whatever is neceſſary ſhould be perſpicuous alſo: and though "clouds and darkneſs are the habitation of his throne," yet they are not the medium through which he has left us to diſcover our duty. In this, as in all other points, it has a decided ſuperiority over all the ancient ſyſtems of philoſophy, which were always in many reſpects impracticable and extravagant, becauſe not framed from obſervations drawn from a perfect knowledge "what was in men." Whereas the whole ſcheme of the goſpel is accommodated to real human nature; laying open its moral diſeaſe, preſenting its only remedy; exhibiting rules of conduct, often difficult indeed, but never impoſſible; and where the rule was ſo high that the practicability ſeemed deſperate, holding out a living pattern, to elucidate the doctrine, and to illuſtrate the precept: offering every where the cleareſt notions of what we have to hope, and what we have to fear; the ſtrongeſt injunctions of what we are to believe; and the moſt explicit directions of what we are to do.

In ſhort, whoever examines the wants of his

own heart, and the appropriated assistance which the Gospel furnishes, will find them to be two tallies which exactly correspond—an internal evidence, stronger perhaps than any other, of the truth of revelation.

This is the religion with which the ingenuous hearts of youth should be warmed, and by which their spirits, while pliant, should be directed. This will afford a "lamp to their paths," stronger, steadier, brighter than the feeble and uncertain glimmer of a cold and comfortless philosophy.

CHAP. IV.

Other symptoms of the decline of christianity—No family religion—Corrupt or negligent examples of superiors—The self-denying and evangelical virtues held in contempt—Neglect of encouraging and promoting religion among servants.

IT was by no means the design of the present undertaking to make a general invective on the corrupt state of manners, or even to animadvert on the conduct of the higher ranks, but inasmuch as the corruption of that conduct, and the depravation of those manners, appear to be a natural consequence of the visible decline of religion.

Of the other obvious causes which contribute to this decline of morals, little will be said. Nor is the present a romantic attempt to restore the simplicity of primitive manners. This is too literally an age of gold, to expect that it should be so in the poetical and figurative sense. It would be unjust and absurd not to form our opinions and expectations from the present general state of society. And it would argue great ignorance of the corruption which commerce, and conquest, and riches, and arts, necessarily introduce into a state, to look for the same sobermindedness, simplicity, and purity among

the *dregs of Romulus*, as the severe and simple manners of elder Rome presented.

But though it would be an attempt of desperate hardihood, to controvert that maxim of the witty bard, that

To mend the world's a vast design;

yet to make the best of the times in which we live; to fill up the measure of our own actual, particular, and individual duties; and to take care that the age shall not be the worse for our having been cast into it, seems to be the bare dictate of common probity, and not a romantic flight of impracticable perfection.

But is it then so very chimerical to imagine that the benevolent can be sober-minded? Is it romantic to desire that the good should be consistent? Is it absurd to fancy that what has once been practised, should not now be impracticable?

It is impossible then not to help regretting that it should be the general temper of many of the leading persons of that age which arrogates to itself the glorious character of the *age of benevolence*, to be kind, and considerate, and compassionate, every where rather than at home: that the rich and the fashionable should be zealous in promoting religious, as well as charitable institutions abroad, and yet discourage every thing which looks like religion in their own families: that they

ſhould be at a conſiderable expence in inſtructing the poor at a diſtance, and yet diſcredit piety among their own ſervants—thoſe more immediate objects of every man's attention whom Providence has enabled to keep any; and for whoſe conduct he will be finally accountable, inaſmuch as he has helped to corrupt it.

Is there any degree of pecuniary bounty without doors which can counteract the miſchief of a wrong example at home; or attone for that infectious laxity of principle, which ſpreads corruption wherever its influence extends? Is not he the beſt benefactor to ſociety who ſets the beſt example, and who does, not only the moſt good, but the leaſt evil? Will not that man, however liberal, very imperfectly promote virtue in the world at large, who neglects to diſſeminate the principles of it within the immediate ſphere of his own perſonal influence, by a ſober conduct and a blameleſs behaviour? Can a generous but profligate perſon attone by his purſe for the diſorders of his life, or expect a bleſſing on his bounties, while he defeats their effect by a profane converſation?

In moral as well as political treatiſes, it is often aſſerted, that it is a great evil to do no good: but it has not been perhaps enough inſiſted on, that it is a great good to do no evil. This ſpecies of goodneſs is not oſtentatious enough for popular declamation; and the value of this abſtinence from vice is

perhaps not well understood by christians, because it wants the ostensible brilliancy of actual performance.

But as the *principles* of christianity are in no great repute, so their concomitant *qualities*, the evangelical virtues, are proportionably disesteemed. But those secret habits of self-controul, those interior and unobtrusive virtues, which excite no astonishment, kindle no emulation, and extort no praise, are yet the most difficult, and the most sublime, and, if christianity be true, will be the most graciously accepted by *him* who witnesses the secret struggle and the silent victory: while the splendid deeds, which have the world for their witness, and immortal fame for their reward, shall perhaps cost him who atchieved them, less than it costs a conscientious christian to subdue one irregular inclination; a conquest which the world will never know, and if it did, would probably despise.

For though great actions performed on human motives are permitted, by the great Disposer, to be equally beneficial to society with such as are performed on purer principles; yet it is an affecting consideration, that, at the final adjustment of accounts, the politician that *raised* a state, or the hero who *preserved* it, may miss of that favour of God, which, if it was not his motive, will probably not be his reward. And it is awful to reflect, as we visit the monuments justly

raiſed by public gratitude, or the ſtatues properly erected by well-earned admiration, on what may be now the unalterable condition of the illuſtrious object of theſe deſerved honours; and that he who has ſaved a ſtate, may have loſt his own ſoul.

A chriſtian life ſeems to conſiſt of two things, almoſt equally difficult; the adoption of good habits, and the exciſion of ſuch as are evil. No one ſets out on a religious courſe with a ſtock of native innocence, or actual freedom from ſin; for there is no ſuch ſtate in human life. The natural heart is not a blank paper, whereon the divine ſpirit has nothing to do but to ſtamp characters of goodneſs; but many blots and defilements are to be eraſed, as well as freſh impreſſions to be made.

The vigilant chriſtian therefore, who acts with an eye to the approbation of his Maker, rather than to that of mankind; to a future account, rather than to preſent glory, will find, that, diligently to cultivate the "unweeded garden" of his own heart; to mend the ſoil; to clear the ground of its indigenous vices, by practiſing the painful buſineſs of extirpation; will be that part of his duty which will coſt him moſt labour, and bring him leaſt credit: while the fair flower of one ſhewy action, produced with little trouble, and of which the pleaſure is reward enough, ſhall gain him more praiſe

than the eradication of the rankest weeds which over-run the natural heart.

But the Gospel judges not after the manner of men; for it never fails to make the abstinent virtues a previous step to the right performance of the operative ones; and the relinquishing what is wrong to be a necessary prelude to the performance of what is right. It makes "ceasing to do evil" the indispensable preliminary to "learning to do well." It continually suggests that something is to be laid aside as well as to be practised. We must "hate vain thoughts" before we can "love God's law." We must lay aside "malice and hypocrisy," to *enable* us "to receive the engrafted word." Having "a conscience void of offence;" "abstaining from fleshly lusts," "bringing every thought into obedience"—these are actions, or rather negations, which, though they never will obtain immortality from the chisel of the statuary, the declamation of the historian, or the panegyric of the poet, serve however to constitute the true christian temper, to promote heavenly mindedness, and to procure the divine favour.

And for our encouragement, it is observable that a more difficult christian virtue generally involves an easier one. An habit of self-denial in permitted pleasures easily induces a victory over such as are unlawful. And to sit loose to our own possessions, ne-

ceſſarily includes an exemption from coveting thoſe of others; and ſo on of the reſt.

Will it be difficult then to trace back to that want of early reſtraint noticed in the preceding chapter, that licence of behaviour which, having been indulged in youth, afterwards reigns uncontrouled in families; and having infected education in its firſt ſprings, taints all the ſtreams of domeſtic virtue? Nor is it ſtrange that that ſame want of religious principle which corrupted our children ſhould corrupt our ſervants.

We ſcarcely go into any company without hearing ſome invective againſt the increaſed profligacy of this order of men; and the remark is made with as great an air of aſtoniſhment, as if the cauſe of the complaint were not as viſible as the truth of it. It would be endleſs to point out inſtances in which the increaſed diſſipation of their betters (as they are oddly called) has contributed to the growth of this evil. But it comes only within the immediate deſign of the preſent undertaking, to inſiſt on the ſingle circumſtance of the almoſt total extermination of religion in faſhionable families, as a cauſe, adequate of itſelf, to any conſequence which depraved morals can produce.

Is there not a degree of injuſtice in perſons who diſcover ſtrong indignation at thoſe crimes which crowd our priſons, and furniſh our inceſſant executions, and yet diſcourage not an internal principle of vice; ſince thoſe

crimes are nothing more than that principle put into action? And it is no less absurd than cruel in such of the great as lead disorderly lives, to expect to prevent vice by the laws they make to restrain or punish it, while their own example is a perpetual source of temptation to commit it. If by their own practice they demonstrate that they think a vicious life is the only happy one, with what colour of justice can they inflict penalties on others, who, by acting on the same principle, expect the same indulgence?

And indeed it is somewhat unreasonable to expect very high degrees of virtue and probity from a class of people whose whole life, after they are admitted into dissipated families, is one continued counteraction of the principles in which they have probably been bred.

When a poor youth is transplanted from one of those excellent institutions which do honour to the present age, and give some hope of reforming the next, into the family, perhaps, of his noble benefactor, who has provided liberally for his instruction; what must be his astonishment at finding the manner of life to which he is introduced diametrically opposite to that life, to which he has been taught that salvation is alone annexed! He has been trained in a wholesome terror of gaming: but now his interests and passions are forcibly engaged on the side of play, since the very profits of his place are made *systemati-*

cally to depend on the card-table. He has been taught that it was his bounden duty to be devoutly thankful for his own ſcanty meal, perhaps of barley bread; yet he ſees his noble lord ſit down every day,

Not to a dinner, but a hecatomb;

To a repaſt for which every element is plundered, and every climate impoveriſhed; for which nature is ranſacked, and art is exhauſted; without even the formal ceremony of a ſlight acknowledgment. It will be lucky for the maſter, if his ſervant does not happen to know that even the pagans never ſat down to a repaſt without making a libation to their deities; and that the Jews did not eat a little fruit, or drink a cup of water, without an expreſſion of devout thankfulneſs.

Next to the law of God, he has been taught to reverence the law of the land; and to reſpect an act of parliament next to a text of Scripture: yet he ſees his honourable protector, publicly in his own houſe, engaged in the evening in playing at a game expreſsly prohibited by the laws, and againſt which perhaps he himſelf had aſſiſted in the day to paſs an act.

While the contempt of religion was confined to wits and philoſophers, the effect was not ſo ſenſibly felt. But we cannot congratulate the ordinary race of mortals on their emancipation from old prejudices, or their indifference to ſacred uſages; as it is not at all viſible that the world is become happier

in proportion as it is become more enlightened. We might rejoice more in the boasted diffusion of light and freedom, were it not apparent that bankruptcies are grown more frequent, robberies more common, divorces more numerous, and forgeries more extensive—that more rich men die by their own hand, and more poor men by the hand of the executioner — than when christianity was practised by the vulgar, and countenanced, at least, by the great.

Is it not to be regretted therefore, while the affluent are encouraging so many admirable schemes for promoting religion among the children of the poor, that they do not like to *perpetuate* the principle, by encouraging it in their servants also? Is it not pity, since these are so moderately furnished with the good things of this life, to rob them of that bright reversion, the bare hope of which is a counterpoise to all the hardships they undergo here—especially since, by diminishing this future hope, we shall not be likely to add to their present usefulness?

Still allowing, what has been already granted, that absolute infidelity is not the reigning evil, and that servants will perhaps be more likely to see religion neglected than to hear it ridiculed; would it not be a meritorious kindness, in families of a better stamp, to furnish them with more opportunities of learning and practising their duty? Is it not impolitic indeed, as well as unkind, to refuse

them any means of having impreſſed on their conſciences the operative principles of chriſtianity? It is but little, barely not to *oppoſe* their going to church, or doing their duty at home, unleſs their opportunities of doing both are facilitated, by giving them, at certain ſeaſons, as few employments as poſſible that may interfere with both. Even when religion is by pretty general conſent baniſhed from our families, that only furniſhes a ſtronger reaſon why our families ſhould not be baniſhed from religion in the churches.

But if theſe opportunities are not made eaſy and convenient to them, their ſuperiors have no right to expect from them a zeal ſo far tranſcending their own, as to induce them to ſurmount difficulties for the ſake of their duty. Religion is never once repreſented in ſcripture as a light attainment; it is never once illuſtrated by an eaſy, a quiet, or an indolent allegory. On the contrary, it is exhibited under the active figure of a combat, a race; ſomething expreſſive of exertion, activity, progreſs. And yet many are unjuſt enough to think that this warfare can be fought, though they are perpetually weakening the vigour of the combatant; this race be run, though they are inceſſantly obſtructing the progreſs of him who runs by ſome hard and interfering command. That that compaſſionate judge who cannot but be particularly touched with the feeling of *their* infirmities, will tenderly allow for their trials,

and be merciful to their failings, can never be doubted; but what portion of that forgiveneſs he will extend to thoſe who lay on their virtue hard burdens "too heavy for them to bear," who ſhall ſay?

To keep any immortal being in a ſtate of ſpiritual darkneſs, is a poſitive diſobedience to *His* law, who when he beſtowed the Bible, no leſs than when he created the material world, ſaid, *Let there be light.* It were well for both the advantage of maſter and ſervant, that the latter ſhould have the doctrines of the Goſpel frequently impreſſed on his heart, that his conſcience ſhould be made familiar with a ſyſtem which offers ſuch clear and intelligible propoſitions of moral duty. The ſtriking interrogation, "how ſhall I do this great wickedneſs, and ſin againſt God?" will perhaps operate as forcibly on an uncultivated mind, as the moſt eloquent eſſay, to prove that man is not an accountable being. That once credited promiſe, that "they who have done well ſhall go into everlaſting life," will be more grateful to the ſpirit of a plain man, than that more elegant and diſintereſted aphoriſm, that *virtue is its own reward.* That "he that walketh uprightly walketh ſurely," is not on the whole dangerous or a miſleading maxim. And "well done, good and faithful ſervant! I will make thee ruler over many things," though offenſive to the liberal ſpirit of philoſophic dignity, is a comfortable ſupport to humble and ſuffering pie-

ty. That "we ſhould do to others as we would they ſhould do to us," is a portable and compendious meaſure of ſocial duty, always at hand, as always referring to ſomething within himſelf, not amiſs for a poor man to carry conſtantly about with him, who has neither time nor learning to ſearch for a better. All Seneca's arguments againſt the fear of death, never yet reconciled one reader to its approach, half ſo effectually as the humble believer is reconciled to it by that ſimple perſuaſion, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

While the modern philoſopher is extending the boundaries of human knowledge, by undertaking to prove that matter is eternal; or enlarging the ſtock of human happineſs, by demonſtrating the extinction of ſpirit: it can do no harm to an unlettered man to believe, that "heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but God's word ſhall not paſs away." While the former is indulging the profitable enquiry why the Deity made the world ſo late, or why he made it at all, it will not hurt the latter to believe that "in the beginning God made the world," and that in the end "he ſhall judge it in righteouſneſs." While the one is criticiſing the creed, he will be no loſer by encouraging the other to keep the commandments.

For it is a very valuable part of chriſtianity, that though it is an entire and perfect ſyſtem in its deſign; though it exhibits one great plan, from which complete trains o

argument, and connected ſchemes of reaſoning may be deduced; yet, in compaſſion to the multitude for whom this benevolent inſtitution was in a good meaſure deſigned, and who could not have comprehended a long chain of propoſitions, or have embraced remote deductions; the moſt important truths of doctrine, and the moſt eſſential documents of virtue, are detailed in ſingle maxims, and compriſed in ſhort ſentences; independent of themſelves, yet making a neceſſary part of a conſummate whole, from a few of which elementary principles, the whole train of human virtues has been deduced, and many a perfect body of ethics has been framed.

CHAP. V.

The negligent conduct of chriſtians, no real objection againſt chriſtianity.—The reaſon why its effects are not more manifeſt to worldly men, is, becauſe believers do not lead chriſtian lives.—Profeſſors differ but little in their practice from unbelievers.—Even real chriſtians are too diffident and timid, and afraid of acting up to their principles.—The abſurdity of the charge commonly brought againſt ſerious people, that they are too ſtrict.

IT is an objection frequently brought againſt chriſtianity, that if it exhibited ſo perfect a ſcheme, if its influences were as ſtrong, if its effects were as powerful, as its friends pretend, it muſt have produced more viſible conſequences in the reformation of mankind. This is not the place fully to anſwer this objection, which, (like all the other cavils againſt our religion) continues to be urged juſt as if it never *had* been anſwered.

That vice and immorality prevail in no ſmall degree, in countries profeſſing chriſtianity, we need not go out of our own to be convinced. But that this is the caſe only becauſe this benign principle is not ſuffered to operate in its full power, will be no leſs obvious to all who are ſincere in their enquiries. For, if we allow (and who that examines im-

partially can help allowing?) that it is the natural tendency of christianity to make men better, then it must be the aversion to receiving it, and not the faults of the principles, which prevents them from becoming so.

Those who are acquainted with the effects it actually produced in the first ages of the church, when it *was* received in its genuine purity, and when it *did* operate without obstruction, from its *followers* at least, will want no other proof of its inherent power and efficacy. At that period, its most decided and industrious enemy, the emperor Julian, could recommend the *manners* of the Galileans to the imitation of his pagan high priest; though he himself, at the same time, was doing every thing which the most inveterate malice, sharpened by the acutest wit, and backed by the most absolute power, could devise, to discredit their doctrines.

Nor would the efficacy of christianity be less visible now, in influencing the conduct of its professors, if its principles were heartily and sincerely received. They would operate on the conduct so effectually, that we should see morals and manners growing out of principles, as spontaneously and necessarily as we see other consequences grow out of their proper and natural causes. Let but this great spring have its unobstructed play, and there would be little occasion to declaim against this excess, or that enormity. If the same skill and care which are employed

in curing ſymptoms, were vigorouſly levelled at the internal principle of the diſeaſe, the moral health would feel the benefit. If that attention which is beſtowed in lopping the redundant and unſightly branches, were devoted to the cultivation of a ſound and uncorrupt root, the effect of this labour would ſoon be diſcovered by the excellence of the fruits.

For though, even in the higheſt poſſible exertion of religious principle, and the moſt diligent practice of all its conſequential train of virtues, man would ſtill find evil propenſities enough, in his fallen nature, to make it neceſſary that he ſhould counteract them, by keeping alive his diligence after higher attainments, and to quicken his aſpirations after a better ſtate; yet the prevailing temper would be in general right, the will would be in a great meaſure rectified; and the heart, feeling and acknowledging the diſeaſe, would apply itſelf diligently to the only remedy. For though even the beſt men have infirmities enough to deplore, commit ſins enough to keep them deeply humble, and feel more ſenſibly than others, the imperfection of that veſſel in which their heavenly treaſure is hid: theſe however have the internal conſolation of knowing that they ſhall have to reckon with one who "knoweth whereof they are made;" who will accept of faith and repentance inſtead of ſin-

less perfection, and of humble sincerity in lieu of entire holiness.

All the heavy charges which have been brought against religion, have been taken from the abuses of it. In every other instance the injustice of this proceeding would be notorious: but there is a general want of candour in the judgment of men on this subject, which we do not find them exercise on other occasions; that of throwing the fault of the erring or ignorant professor on the profession itself.

It does not derogate from the honourable profession of arms, that there are cowards and braggarts. If any man lose his estate by the chicanery of an attorney, or his health by the blunder of a physician, it is commonly said, that the one was a disgrace to his business, and the other was ignorant of it; but no one therefore concludes that law and physic are contemptible professions.

Christianity alone is obliged to bear all the obliquy incurred by the misconduct of its followers; to sustain all the reproach excited by ignorant, by fanatical, by superstitious, or hypocritical professors. But whoever accuses it of a tendency to produce the errors of these professors, must have picked up his opinion any where rather than in the New Testament, which being the only authentic history of christianity, is that which candour would naturally consult for information.

But as worldly and irreligious men do not draw their notions from that pure fountain, but from the polluted ſtream of human practice; as they form their judgment of divine truth from the conduct of thoſe who pretend to be enlightened by it; ſome charitable allowance *muſt* be made for the contempt which they entertain for chriſtianity, when they ſee what poor effects it produces in the lives of the generality of profeſſing chriſtians. What do they obſerve there which can lead them to entertain very high ideas of the principles which give birth to ſuch practices?

Do men of the world diſcover any marked, any decided difference between the conduct of nominal chriſtians, and that of the reſt of their neighbours who pretend to no religion at all? Do they ſee, in the daily lives of ſuch, any great abundance of thoſe fruits by which they have heard believers are to be known? On the contrary, do they not diſcern in them the ſame anxious and unwearied purſuit after the things of the earth, as in thoſe who do not profeſs to have any thought of heaven? Do not they ſeem then to labour as ſedulouſly in the intereſts of a debaſing and frivolous diſſipation, as thoſe who do not pretend to have any nobler object in view? Is there not the ſame eagerneſs to plunge into all ſorts of follies themſelves, and the ſame unrighteous ſpeed in introducing their children to them, as if they had never entered into a ſolemn engagement

to renounce them? Is there not the ſame ſelf-indulgence, the ſame luxury, and the ſame paſſionate attachment to the things of this world in them, as is viſible in thoſe who do not look for another?

Do not thoughtleſs neglect, and habitual diſſipation, anſwer, as to ſociety, all the ends of the moſt decided infidelity? Between the barely decent, and the openly profane, there is indeed this difference; that the one, by making no profeſſion, deceives neither the world, nor his own heart; while the other, by intrenching himſelf in forms, fancies that he does ſomething, and thanks God that "he is not like the publican." The one only ſhuts his eyes upon the danger which the other deſpiſes.

But theſe unfruitful profeſſors would do well to recollect, that, by a conduct ſo little worthy of their high calling, they not only violate the law to which they have vowed obedience, but occaſion many to diſbelieve or to deſpiſe it; that they are thus in a great meaſure accountable for the infidelity of others, and of courſe will have to anſwer for more than their own perſonal offences. For did they in any reſpect live up to the principles they profeſs; did they adorn the doctrines of chriſtianity by a life in any degree conſonant to their faith; did they exhibit any thing of the "beauty of holineſs" in their daily converſation; they would then give ſuch a demonſtrative proof, not only

of the ſincerity of their own obedience, but of the brightneſs of that divine light by which they profeſs to walk, that the moſt determined unbeliever would at laſt begin to think there muſt be *ſomething* in a religion of which the effects were ſo viſible, and the fruits ſo amiable; and might in time be led to "glorify," not *them*, not the imperfect doers of theſe works, but "their Father which is in heaven." Whereas, as things are at preſent carried on, the obvious concluſion muſt be, either that chriſtians do not believe in the religion they profeſs, or that there is no truth in the religion itſelf.

For will he not naturally ſay, that, if its influences were ſo predominant, its conſequences muſt be more evident? that, if the prize held out were really ſo bright, thoſe who truly believed ſo would ſurely *do* ſomething, and *ſacrifice* ſomething, to obtain it?

This ſwells the amount of the actual miſchief beyond calculation. And there is ſomething terrible in the idea of this ſort of indefinite evil, that the careleſs chriſtian can never know the extent of the contagion he ſpreads, nor the multiplied infection which *they* may communicate in *their* turn, whom *his* diſorders firſt corrupted.

And there is this farther aggravation of his offence, that he will not only be anſwerable for all the poſitive evil of which his example is the cauſe; but for the omiſſion of all the probable good which might have been

called forth in others, had *his* actions been consistent with his profession. What a strong, what an almost irresistible conviction would it carry to the hearts of unbelievers, if they beheld that characteristic difference in the manners of christians, which their profession gives one a right to expect! if they saw that disinterestedness, that humility, sober-mindedness, temperance, simplicity, and sincerity, which are the unavoidable fruits of a genuine faith!

But, while a man talks like a saint, and yet lives like a sinner; while he professes to believe like an apostle, and yet leads the life of a sensualist; talks of an ardent faith, and yet exhibits a cold and low practice; boasts himself the disciple of a meek master, and yet is as much a slave to his passions as they who acknowledge no such authority; while he appears the proud professor of an humble religion, or the intemperate champion of a self-denying one: such a man brings christianity into disrepute; confirms those in error who might have been awakened to conviction; strengthens doubt into disbelief; and hardens indifference into contempt.

Even among those of a better cast, and a purer principle, the excessive restraints of timidity, caution, and that "fear of man, which bringeth a snare," confine, and almost stifle the generous spirit of an ardent exertion in the cause of religion. Christi-

anity may pathetically expoſtulate, that it is not always "an open enemy which diſhonours her," but her "familiar friend." And, "what doſt thou more than others?" is a queſtion which even the good and worthy ſhould often aſk themſelves, in order to quicken their zeal; to prevent the total ſtagnation of unexerted principles, on the one hand; or the danger, on the other, of their being driven down the gulf of ruin, by the unreſiſted and confluent tides of temptation, faſhion, and example.

In a very ſtrict and mortified age, of which a ſcrupulous ſeverity was the predominant character, precautions againſt an exceſſive zeal might, and doubtleſs would, be a wholeſome and prudent meaſure. But in theſe times of relaxed principle and frigid indifference, to ſee people ſo vigilantly on their guard againſt the imaginary miſchiefs of enthuſiaſm, while they run headlong into the real oppoſite perils of a deſtructive licentiouſneſs, puts one in mind of the one-eyed animal in the fable, who, living on the banks of the ocean, never fancied he could be deſtroyed any way but by drowning: but, while he kept that one eye conſtantly fixed on the ſea, on which ſide he concluded all the peril lay, he was devoured by an enemy on the dry land, from which quarter he never ſuſpected any danger.

Are not the miſchiefs of an enthuſiaſtic piety inſiſted on with as much earneſtneſs as

if an extravagant devotion were the prevailing propensity? Is not the necessity of moderation as vehemently urged as if an intemperate zeal were the epidemic distemper of the great world? As if all our apparent danger and natural bias lay on the side of a too rigid austerity, which required the discreet and constant counteraction of an opposite principle? Would not a stranger be almost tempted to imagine, from the frequent invectives against extreme strictness, that abstraction from the world, and a monastic rage for retreat, were the ruling temper; that we were in some danger in seeing our places of diversion abandoned; and the enthusiastic scenes of the *Holy Fathers of the desert* acted over again by the frantic and uncontroulable devotion of our young persons of fashion?

It is seriously to be regretted, in an age like the present, remarkable for indifference in religion and levity in manners, and which stands so much in need of lively patterns of firm and resolute piety, that many who really are christians on the soberest conviction, should not appear more openly and decidedly on the side they have espoused; that they assimilate so very much with the manners of those about them (which manners they yet scruple not to disapprove;) and, instead of an avowed but prudent steadfastness, which might draw over the others, appear evidently fearful of being thought

preciſe and over-ſcrupulous: and actually ſeem to diſavow their right principles, by conceſſions and accommodations not ſtrictly conſiſtent with them. They often ſeem cautiouſly afraid of *doing too much*, and *going too far;* and the dangerous plea, the neceſſity of *living like other people*, of *being like the reſt of the world*, and the propriety of *not being particular*, is brought as a reaſonable apology for a too yielding and indiſcriminate conformity.

But, at a time when almoſt all are ſinking into the prevailing corruption, how beautiful a rare, a ſingle integrity is, let the inſtances of Lot and Noah declare. And to thoſe with whom a poem is an higher authority than the Bible, let me recommend the moſt animated picture of a righteous ſingularity that ever was delineated, in

> ——The Seraph Abdiel, faithful found
> Among the faithleſs, faithful only he;
> Among innumerable falſe, unmov'd,
> Unſhaken, unſeduc'd, unterrified,
> His loyalty he kept, his love and zeal:
> Nor NUMBERS, nor EXAMPLE with him wrought
> To ſwerve from truth, or change his conſtant mind,
> Tho' SINGLE.
>
> PAR. LOST, b. iv.

Few indeed of the more orderly and decent have any objection to that degree of religion which is compatible with their general acceptance with others, or the full enjoy-

ment of their own pleasures. For a formal and ceremonious exercise of the outward duties of christianity, may not only be kept up without exciting censure, but will even procure a certain respect and confidence ; and is not quite irreconcileable with a voluptuous and dissipated life. So far many go ; and so far " as godliness is profitable to the life that *is*," it passes without reproach.

But as soon as men begin to consider religious exercises not as a decency, but a duty ; not as a commutation for a self-denying life, but as a means to promote a holy temper, and a virtuous conduct : as soon as they feel disposed to carry the effect of their devotion into their daily life: as soon as their principles discover themselves, by leading them to withdraw from those scenes, and abstain from those actions, in which the gay place their supreme happiness : as soon as something is to be *done*, and something is to be *parted with ;* then the world begins to take offence, and to stigmatize the *activity* of that piety, which had been commended as long as it remained *inoperative*, and had only evaporated in *words*.

But when religion, like the vital principle, takes its seat in the heart, and sends out supplies of life and heat to every part ; diffuses motion, soul, and vigour, through the whole circulation ; and informs and animates the whole man : when it operates on the practice, influences the conversation, breaks

out into a lively zeal for the honour of God, and the beſt intereſts of mankind; then the ſincerity, or the underſtanding, of that perſon will become queſtionable: and it muſt be owing to a very fortunate combination of circumſtances indeed, if he can at once preſerve the character of parts and piety.

But it is a folly to talk of being too holy, too ſtrict, or too good. Where there happens to appear ſome foundation for the charge of enthuſiaſm (as there are indeed too often in good people eccentricities which juſtify the cenſure), we may depend upon it, that it proceeds from ſome defect in the judgment, and not from any exceſs in the piety; for in goodneſs there is no exceſs: and it is as prepoſterous to ſay that any one is too good, or too pious, as that he is too wiſe, too ſtrong, or too healthy; ſince the higheſt point in all theſe is only the perfection of that quality which we admired in a lower degree. There may be an *imprudent*, but there cannot be a *ſuperabundant* goodneſs. An ardent imagination may miſlead a rightly turned heart; and a weak intellect may incline the beſt intentioned to aſcribe too much value to things of comparatively ſmall importance. Such an one not having diſcernment enough to perceive where the force and ſtreſs of duty lie, may innocently diſcredit religion by a too ſcrupulous exactneſs in points of ſmall intrinſic value.

And even well-meaning men, as well as hypocrites, may think too much is done whe-

their "mint" and "anise" are rigorously tithed.

But in observing the "weightier matters of the law," in the practice of universal holiness, in the love of God, there can be no possibility of exceeding while there is no limitation in the command. We are in no danger of loving our neighbour *better* than ourselves; and let us remember, that we do not go beyond, but fall short of our duty, while we love him *less*. If we were commanded to love God with *some* of our heart, with *part* of our soul, and a *portion* of our strength, there would then be some colour for those perpetual cavils about the *proportion* of love, and the *degree* of obedience, which are due to him. But as the command is so definite, so absolute, so comprehensive, so entire; nothing can be more absurd than that unmeaning, but not unfrequent charge brought against serious persons, that *they are too strict*.

The foundation of this silly censure is commonly laid in the first principles of education, where an early separation is systematically made between duty and pleasure. One of the first baits held out for the encouragement of children, is, that when they have done their *duty*, they will be entitled to some *pleasure;* thus forcibly disjoining what should be considered as inseparable. And there is not a more common justification of that idle and dissipated manner in which the second half of the Sunday is commonly spent, even

by thoſe who make a conſcience of ſpending the former part properly, than that, "now they have done their duty, they may take their pleaſure."

But while chriſtian obſervances are conſidered as taſks, which are to be got over to entitle us to ſomething more pleaſant; as a burthen which we muſt endure in order to propitiate an inexorable Judge, who makes a hard bargain with his creatures, and allows them juſt ſo much amuſement in pay for ſo much drudgery; we muſt not wonder that ſuch low views are entertained of chriſtianity, and that a religious life is reprobated as ſtrict and rigid.

But to him who acts from the nobler motive of love, and the animating power of the chriſtian hope, the exerciſe is the reward, the permiſſion is the privilege, the work is the wages. *He* does not carve out ſome miſerable pleaſure, and ſtipulate for ſome meagre diverſion, to pay himſelf for the hard performance of his duty, who in that very performance experiences the higheſt pleaſure, and feels the trueſt gratification of which his nature is capable.

This reprobated ſtrictneſs therefore, ſo far from being the ſource of diſcomfort and miſery, as is pretended, is in reality the true cauſe of actual enjoyment, by laying the axe to the root of all thoſe turbulent and uneaſy paſſions, the unreſerved and yet imperfect gratification of which does ſo much more

tend to diſturb our happineſs than that ſelf-government chriſtianity enjoins.

But all precepts ſeem rigorous, all obſervances are really hard, where there is not an entire conviction of God's right to our obedience, and an internal principle of faith and love to make that obedience pleaſant. A religious life is indeed a hard bondage to one immerſed in the practices of the world, the fleſh, and the faſhion. To a perfect chriſtian, it is "perfect freedom." He does not now abſtain from ſuch and ſuch things, merely becauſe they are forbidden (as he did in the firſt ſtages of his progreſs,) but becauſe his ſoul has no longer any pleaſure in them. And it would be the ſevereſt of all puniſhments to oblige him to return to thoſe practices, from which he once abſtained with difficulty, and through the leſs noble principle of fear.

There is not therefore perhaps a greater miſtake than that common notion entertained by the more orderly part of the faſhionable world, that a little religion will make people happy, but that an high degree of it is incompatible with all enjoyment. For ſurely *that* religion can add little to a man's happineſs which reſtrains him from the commiſſion of a wrong action, but which does not pretend to extinguiſh the bad principle from which the act proceeded. A religion which ties the hands, without changing the heart; which, like the hell of Tantalus, ſubdues not

the desire, yet forbids the gratification, is indeed an uncomfortable state. Such a religion, though it may gain a man something on the side of reputation, will give him but little inward comfort, if his heart be still left a prey to that temper which produced the evil, even though terror or shame may have prevented the outward act.

That people devoted to the pursuits of a dissipated life should conceive of religion as a difficult and even unattainable state, it is easy to believe. That they should conceive of it as an unhappy state, is the consummation of their error and ignorance: for that a *rational* being should have his understanding enlightened; that an *immortal* being should have his views extended and enlarged; that a *helpless* being should have a consciousness of assistance; a *sinful* being the prospect of pardon; or a *fallen* one the assurance of restoration, does not seem a probable ground of unhappiness; and on any other subject such reasoning would not be admissible.

CHAP VI.

A stranger, from observing the fashionable mode of life, would not take this to be a christian country.—Lives of professing christians examined by a comparison with the Gospel.—Christianity not made the rule of life, even by those who profess to receive it as an object of faith.---Temperizing divines contribute to lower the credit of christianity.---Loose harangues on morals not calculated to reform the heart.

THE christian religion is not intended, as some of its fashionable professors seem to fancy, to operate as a charm, a talisman, or incantation; and to produce its effect by our pronouncing certain mystical words, attending at certain consecrated places, and performing certain hallowed ceremonies: but it is an active, vital, influential principle, operating on the heart, restraining the desires, affecting the general conduct, and as much regulating our commerce with the world, our business, pleasures, and enjoyments, our conversations, designs and actions, as our behaviour in public worship, or even in private devotion.

That the effects of such a principle are strikingly visible in the lives and manners of the generality of those who give the law to fashion, will not perhaps be insisted on. And indeed, the whole present system of fashiona-

ble life is utterly deſtructive of ſerioufneſs. To inſtance only in one particular amuſement, which is generally thought inſignificant, and is in effect ſo vapid, that one almoſt wonders how it can be dangerous: it would excite laughter, becauſe we are ſo broke into the habit, were I to inſiſt on the immorality of paſſing one's whole life in a crowd. But thoſe promiſcuous myriads which compoſe the ſociety, falſely ſo called, of the gay world; who are brought together without eſteem, remain without pleaſure, and part without regret; who live in a round of diverſions, the poſſeſſion of which is ſo joyleſs, though the abſence is ſo inſupportable, theſe, by the mere force of inceſſant and indiſcriminate aſſociation, weaken, and in time wear out, the beſt feelings and affections of the human heart. And the mere ſpirit of diſſipation, thus contracted from invariable habit, even detached from all its concomitant evils, is in itſelf as hoſtile to a religious ſpirit, as more poſitive and actual offences. Far be it from me to ſay that it is as criminal; I only inſiſt that it is as oppoſite to that heavenly mindedneſs which is the eſſence of the chriſtian temper.

We know that in the mingled maſs which celebrate the orgies of diſſipation, are many amiable and well-inclined hearts, whom nothing but the tyranny of faſhion could have driven thither. But let us ſuppoſe an ignorant and unprejudiced ſpectator, who ſhould

have been taught the theory of all the religions on the globe, brought hither from the other hemisphere. Set him down in the politest part of our capital, and let him determine, if he can, except from what he shall see interwoven in the texture of our laws, and kept up in the service of our churches, to what particular religion we belong. Let him not mix entirely with the most flagitious, but only with the most fashionable; at least, let him keep what they themselves call *the best company*. Let him scrutinize into the manners, customs, conversations, habits, and diversions, most in vogue, and then infer what is the established religion of the land.

That it could not be the Jewish, he would soon discover; for of rites, ceremonies, and external observances, he would trace but slender remains. He would be equally convinced that it could not be the religion of old Greece and Rome; for that enjoined reverence to the gods, and inculcated obedience to the laws. His most probable conclusion would be in favour of the Mahometan faith, did not the excessive indulgence of some of the most distinguished, in an article of intemperance prohibited even by the sensual prophet of Arabia, defeat that conjecture.

How would the petrified enquirer be astonished, if he were told that all these were of a religion meek, spiritual, self-denying; of which poverty of spirit, a renewed mind,

and non-conformity to the world, were ſpecific diſtinctions!

When he ſaw the ſons of men of fortune, ſcarcely old enough to be ſent to ſchool, admitted to be ſpectators of the turbulent and unnatural diverſions of racing and gaming; and the almoſt infant daughters, even of wiſe and virtuous mothers (an innovation which faſhion herſelf forbad till now,) carried with moſt unthrifty anticipation to the frequent and late-protracted ball; would he believe that we were of a religion which has required from theſe very parents, a ſolemn vow that theſe children ſhould be bred up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?"

When he beheld thoſe nocturnal clubs, ſo ſubverſive of private virtue and domeſtic happineſs, would he conceive that we were of a religion which in expreſs terms "exhorts young men to be ſober-minded?"

When he ſaw thoſe magnificent and brightly illuminated ſtructures which decorate and diſgrace the very precincts of the royal reſidence (ſo free itſelf from all theſe pollutions;) when he beheld the nightly offerings made to the demon of play, on whoſe cruel altar the fortune and happineſs of wives and children are offered up without remorſe; would he not conclude that we were of ſome of thoſe barbarous religions which enjoin unnatural ſacrifices, and whoſe horrid deities are appeaſed with nothing leſs than human victims? If any thing could add to his aſto-

nishment, it must be to observe, in some more private temples of this demon, that the fair sacrifice is often a voluntary one, self-offered, and at once both priestess and victim.

Now, ought we not to pardon our imaginary spectator, if he should not at once conclude that all the various descriptions of persons, above noticed, professed the christian religion; supposing him to have no other way of determining but by the conformity of their manners to that rule by which he had undertaken to judge them? We indeed ourselves must judge with greater latitude, and candidly take the present state of society into the account; which, in some few instances perhaps, must be allowed to dispense with that literal strictness, which more peculiarly belonged to the first ages of the Gospel.

But as this is really a christian country, professing to enjoy the purest faith in the purest form; it cannot be unreasonable to go a little farther, and enquire whether christianity, however firmly established, and generally professed in it, is really practised by that order of fashionable persons, who, while they are absorbed in the delights of the world, and their whole souls devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, yet still arrogate to themselves the honourable name of christians, and occasionally testify their claim to this high character, by a general profession of their belief in, and a decent compliance with, the forms of religion.

This enquiry must be made, not by a comparison with the state of christianity in other countries (a mode always fallacious, whether adopted by nations or individuals, is that of comparing themselves with those who are still worse ;) nor must it be made from any notions drawn from custom, decency, or any other human standard ; but from a scripture view of what real religion is ; from any one of those striking and comprehensive representations of it, which may be found condensed in so many single passages of the sacred writings.

Whoever then looks into the Book of God, and observes its prevailing spirit, and then looks into that part of the world under consideration, will not surely be thought very censorious, if he pronounce that the conformity between them does not seem to be *very* striking ; and that the one does not very evidently appear to be dictated by the other. Will he discover that the christian religion is so much as pretended to be made the *rule of life*, even by that decent order who profess not to have discarded it as an object of faith? Do even the more regular, who neglect not public observances, consider christianity as *the measure of their actions?* Do even what the *world* calls religious persons employ their time, their abilities, and their fortune, as talents for which they however confess they believe themselves accountable : or do they in any respect live, I will not say up to their pro-

fession (for what human being does so?) but in any consistency with it, or even with an eye to its predominant tendencies? Do persons in general of this description seem to consider the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel as any thing more than a form of words, necessary indeed to be repeated, and proper to be believed? But do they consider them as necessary to be adopted into a governing principle of action?

Is it consistent to declare in the solemn assemblies that they are "miserable offenders," and that "there is no health in them," and never in their daily lives to discover any symptom of that humility which should naturally be implied in such a declaration?

Is it reasonable, or consistent with good sense, earnestly to lament having "followed the desires of their own hearts," and then deliberately to plunge into such a torrent of dissipations as clearly indicates that they do not struggle to resist *one* of them? I dare not say this is hypocrisy, but surely it is inconsistency.

"Be ye not conformed to this world," is a leading principle in the book they acknowledge as their guide. But after unresistingly assenting to this, as a doctrinal truth, at church; how absurd would they think any one who should expect them to adopt it into their practice! Perhaps the whole law of God does not exhibit a single precept more expressly, more steadily, and more uniformly

rejected. If it mean any thing, it can hardly be consistent with that mode of life emphatically distinguished by the appellation of *fashionable*.

Now would it be much more absurd (for any other reason but because it is not the custom) if our legislators were to meet one day in every week, gravely to read over all the obsolete statutes, and rescinded acts of parliament; than it is for the order of persons of the above description to assemble every Sunday, to profess their belief in, and submission to, a system of principles, which they do not so much as *intend* shall be binding on their practice?

But to continue our enquiry.—There is not a more common or more intelligible definition of human duty, than that of "Fear God, and keep his commandments." Now, as to the first of these inseparable precepts, can we, with the utmost stretch of charity, be very forward to conclude that God is really "very greatly feared," in secret, by those who give too manifest indications that they live "without him in the world? And as to the latter precept, which naturally grows out of the other—without noticing any of the flagrant breaches of the moral law, let us only confine ourselves to the allowed, general, and notorious violation of the fourth commandment, and then enquire what apology can be offered for this, by believers at least, who scruple not to allow the authority

of that book, which declares, among many other alarming denunciations, that the wilful and habitual offender in any one point is guilty of the breach of the whole law.

Shall we have reason to change our opinion, if we take another divine representation of the sum and substance of religion, and apply it as a touchstone in the present trial—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c. and thy neighbour as thyself?" Now, judging by inference, do we see many public proofs of that heavenly-mindedness which would be the inevitable effect of such a fervent and animated dedication of all the powers, faculties, and affections of the soul to him who gave it? And, as to the great rule of social duty expressed in the second clause, do we observe very much of that considerate kindness, that pure disinterestedness, that conscientious attention to the comfort of others, especially of dependants and inferiors, which might be expected from those who enjoy the privilege of so unerring a standard of conduct? a standard which, if impartially consulted, must make our kindness to others bear an exact proportion to our self-love: a rule in which christian principle, operating on human sensibility, could not fail to decide aright in every supposable case. For no man can doubt how he ought to act towards another, while the corresponding suggestions of conscience and feeling concur in letting him know how he would

wiſh, in a change of circumſtances, that others ſhould act towards him.

Or ſuppoſe we take a more detailed ſurvey, by a third rule, which indeed is not ſo much the principle as the effect of piety.—"True religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction, and to keep himſelf *unſpotted from the world.*" Now if chriſtianity inſiſts that obedience to the latter injunction be the true evidence of the ſincerity of thoſe who fulfil the former, is the beneficence of the faſhionable world *very* ſtrikingly illuſtrated by this ſpotleſs purity, this exemption from the pollutions of the world, which is here declared to be its infallible ſymptom?

But if I were to venture to take my eſtimate with a view more immediately evangelical; if I preſumed to look for that genuine chriſtianity which conſiſts in "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt," to inſiſt that, whatever *natural* religion and *faſhionable* religion may teach, it is the peculiarity of the *chriſtian* religion to humble the ſinner and exalt the Saviour; to inſiſt that not only the groſsly flagitious, but that *all*, have ſinned; that *all* are by nature in a ſtate of condemnation; that *all* ſtand in need of mercy, of which there is no hope but on the Goſpel terms; that eternal life is promiſed to thoſe *only* who accept it on the offered conditions of "faith, repentance, and renewed obedience;"—if I were to in-

sist on such evidences of our christianity as these; if I were to express these doctrines in plain scriptural terms, without lowering, qualifying, disguising, or doing them away; if I were to insist on this belief, and its implied and corresponding practices; I am aware that, with whatever condescending patience this little tract might have been so far perused, many a fashionable reader would here throw it aside, as having now detected the palpable enthusiast, the abettor of "strange doctrines," long ago consigned over by the liberal and the polite to bigots and fanatic. And yet, if the Bible be true, this is a simple and faithful description of christianity.

After having, however, just ventured to hint that such are indeed the humbling doctrines of the Gospel, to which alone eternal life is promised; I shall, in deep humility, forbear enlarging on this part of the subject, which has been exhausted by the labours of wise and pious men in all ages. Unhappily, however, the most awakening of these writers are not the favourite guests in the closets of the more fashionable christians; who, when they happen to be more seriously disposed than ordinary, are fond of finding out some middle kind of reading, which recommends some half-way state, something between paganism and christianity, suspending the mind, like the position of Mahomet's tomb, between earth and heaven: a kind of

in the ſcale of virtue with which he may content himſelf, ſo as barely to eſcape eternal puniſhment; how much indulgence he may allow himſelf, without abſolutely forfeiting his chance of ſafety; what is the uttermoſt verge to which he may venture of this world's enjoyment, and yet juſt keep within a poſſibility of hope for the next: adjuſting the ſcales of indulgence and ſecurity with ſuch a ſcrupulous equilibrium, as not to loſe much pleaſure, yet not incur much penalty.

This is hardly an exaggerated repreſentation: and to theſe low views of duty is partly owing ſo much of that bare-weight virtue with which even chriſtians are ſo apt to content themſelves: fighting for every inch of ground which may poſſibly be taken within the pales of permiſſion; and ſtretching thoſe pales to the utmoſt edge of that limitation about which the world and the Bible contend.

But while the nominal chriſtian is perſuading himſelf that there can be no harm in going *a little farther*, the real chriſtian is always afraid of going too far. While the one is debating for a little more diſputed ground, the other is ſo fearful of ſtraying into the regions of unallowed indulgence, that he keeps at a prudent diſtance from the extremity of his permitted limits, and is as anxious in reſtricting as the other is in extending them. One thing is clear, and it may be no bad indication by which to diſcover the ſtate of a

man's heart to himſelf: while he is contending for this allowance, and ſtipulating for the other indulgence, it will ſhew him that, whatever change there may be in his life, there is none in his heart; the temper remains as it did; and it is by the inward frame rather than the outward act, that he can beſt judge of his *own* ſtate, whatever may be the rule by which he undertakes to judge of that of another.

It is leſs wonderful that there are not more chriſtians, than that chriſtians, as they are called, are not better men: for if chriſtianity be not true, the motives to virtue are not high enough to quicken ordinary men to very extraordinary exertions. We ſee them do and ſuffer every day, for popularity, for cuſtom, for faſhion, for the point of honour, not only more than good men do and ſuffer for religion, but a great deal more than religion requires them to do. For her *reaſonable ſervice* demands no ſacrifices but what are ſanctified by good ſenſe, ſound policy, right reaſon, and uncorrupt judgment.

Many of theſe faſhionable profeſſors even go ſo far as to bring their right faith as an apology for their wrong practice. They have a commodious way of intrenching themſelves within the ſhelter of ſome general poſition of unqueſtionable truth. Even the great chriſtian hope, becomes a ſnare to them. They apologize for a life of offence, by taking refuge in the ſupreme goodneſs they are abuſ-

reading which, while it quiets the conſcience by being on the ſide of morals, neither awakens their fears, nor alarms their ſecurity. By dealing in general, it comes home to the hearts of none; it flatters the paſſions of the reader, by aſcribing high merit to the performance of certain right actions, and the forbearance from certain wrong ones; among which, that reader muſt be very unlucky indeed who does not find ſome performances and ſome forbearances of his own. It at once enables him to keep heaven in his eye, and the world in his heart. It agreeably repreſents the readers to themſelves as amiable perſons; guilty indeed of a few faults, but never as condemned ſinners under ſentence of death. It commonly abounds with high encomiums on the dignity of human nature; the good effects of virtue on health, fortune, and reputation; the dangers of a blind zeal, the miſchiefs of enthuſiaſm, and the folly of being "righteous over much;" with various other kindred ſentiments, which, if they do not fall in of themſelves with the corruptions of our nature may, by a little warping, be eaſily accommodated to them.

Theſe are the too ſucceſsful practices of lukewarm and temporizing divines, who have become popular by blunting the edge of that heavenly tempered weapon, whoſe ſalutary keenneſs, but for their "deceitful handling," would oftener "pierce to the dividing aſunder of ſoul and ſpirit."

But those severer preachers of righteousness, who disgust by applying too closely to the conscience; who probe the inmost heart, and lay open all its latent peccancies; who treat of principles as the only certain source of manners; who lay the axe to the root, oftener than the pruning knife to the branch; who insist much and often on the great leading truths, that man is a fallen creature, who must be restored, if he be restored at all, by means very little flattering to human pride —such as these will seldom find access to the houses and hearts of the more modish christians; unless they happen to owe their admission to some subordinate quality of style; unless they can captivate, with the seducing graces of language, those well-bred readers, who are childishly amusing themselves with the garnish, when they are perishing for want of food; who are searching for polished periods, when they should be in quest of alarming truths; who are looking for elegance of composition, when they should be anxious for eternal life.

Whatever comparative praise may be due to the former class of writers, when viewed with others of a less decent order, yet I am not sure whether so many books of frigid morality, exhibiting such inferior motives of action, and such moderate representations of duty, have not done religion much more harm than good; whether they do not lead many a reader to enquire what is the lowest degree

ing. That "God is all merciful," is the common reply to thoſe who hint to them their danger. This is a falſe and fatal application of a divine and comfortable truth. Nothing can be more certain than the propoſition, nor more deluſive than the inference: for their deduction implies, not that he is merciful to ſin repented of, but to ſin continued in. But it is a moſt fallacious hope to expect that God will violate his own covenant, or that he is indeed "all mercy," to the utter excluſion of his other attributes of perfect holineſs, purity, and juſtice.

It is a dangerous folly to reſt on theſe vague and general notions of uncovenanted mercy; and nothing can be more deluſive than this indefinite truſt in being forgiven in our *own* way, after God has clearly revealed to us that he will only forgive us in *his* way.

But the truth is, no one does truly truſt in God, who does not endeavour to obey him. For to break his laws, and yet to depend on his favour; to live in oppoſition to his will, and yet in expectation of his mercy; to violate his commands, and yet look for his acceptance, would not, in any other inſtance, be thought a reaſonable ground of conduct; and yet it is by no means as uncommon as it is inconſiſtent.

But the life of a diſſipated chriſtian ſeems to be a perpetual ſtruggle to reconcile impoſſibilities: it is an endeavour to unite what God has for ever ſeparated, peace and ſin;

unchristian practices with christian observances; a quiet conscience and a disorderly life; a heart full of this world, and an unfounded dependance on the happiness of the next.

CHAP. VII.

View of these who acknowledge christianity as a perfect system of morals, but deny its divine authority—Morality not the whole of religion.

AS in the preceding chapter notice was taken of that description of persons who profess to receive christianity with great reverence as a matter of faith, who yet do not pretend to adopt it as a rule of conduct; I shall conclude these slight remarks with some short animadversions on another set of men, and that not a small one, among the decent and the fashionable, who profess to think it exhibits an admirable system of morals, while they deny its divine authority; though that alone can make the necessity of obeying its precepts binding on the consciences of men.

This is a very discreet scheme: for such persons at once save themselves from the discredit of having their understanding imposed upon by a supposed blind submission to evidences and authorities; and yet, prudently enough, secure to themselves in no small degree, the reputation of good men. By steering this middle kind of course, they contrive to be reckoned liberal by the *philosophers*, and decent by the believers.

But we are not commonly to expect to see the pure morality of the Gospel very carefully transfused into the lives of such objectors. And indeed it would be unjust to imagine that the precepts *should* be most scrupulously observed by those who reject the authority. The influence of divine truth, must necessarily best prepare the heart for an unreserved obedience to its laws. If we do not depend on that pardon and acceptance which christianity offers, we shall want the best motive to the actions and performances which it enjoins. A lively belief *must* therefore precede a very hearty and complete obedience. We are told, on the very best authority, that truth sanctifies the heart: and the same authority adds, that, the "word of God is truth." That cammand therefore, for instance, to set "our affections on things above," will operate but faintly, till that spirit from which the command proceeds, touches the heart, and convinces it that no human good is worthy of the entire affection of an immortal creature. An unreserved faith in the promiser must precede our worthy performance of any duty to which the promise is annexed.

But as to a set of duties enforced by no other motive than a bare acquiescence in their beauty, and a cold conviction of their propriety, but impelled by no obedience to his authority who impose them; though we know not how well they might be perform-

ed by pure and impeccable beings, yet we know how they commonly *are* performed by frail and disorderly creatures, fallen from their innocence, and corrupt in their very natures.

Besides, nothing but a conviction of the truth of christianity can reconcile thinking beings to the extraordinary appearances of things in the Creator's moral government of the world. The works of God are an enigma, of which his word alone is the solution. The dark veil which is thrown over the divine dispensations in this lower world, must naturally shock those who consider only the single scene which is acting on the present stage; but is reconcileable to him who, having learnt from revelation the nature of the laws by which the great Author acts, trusts confidently that the catastrophe will set all to rights. The confusion which sin and the passions have introduced; the triumph of wickedness, the seemingly arbitrary disproportion of human conditions, accountable on no scheme but that which the Gospel has opened to us—have all a natural tendency to withdraw from the love of God the hearts of those who erect themselves into critics on the divine conduct, and yet will not study the plan, and get acquainted with the rules, so far as it has pleased the Supreme Disposer to reveal them.

Till therefore the word of God is used as "a lamp to their paths," men can neither truly discern the crookedness of their own ways, nor the perfection of that light by which they are directed to walk. And this light can only be seen by its own proper brightness; it has no other medium. Till therefore "the secret of the Lord" is with men, they will not truly "fear him;" till he has "enlarged their hearts" with the knowledge and belief of his word, they will not very vigorously "run the way of his commandments." Till they have acquired that "faith without which it is impossible to please God," they will not attain that holiness without which no man can see him.

And indeed if God has thought fit to make the gospel an instrument of salvation, we must own the necessity of receiving it as a divine institution, before it is likely to operate very effectually on the conduct. The great Creator, if we may judge by analogy from natural things, is so wise an œconomist, that he always adapts, with the most accurate precision, the instrument to the work; and never lavishes more means than are necessary to accomplish the proposed end. If therefore christianity had been intended for nothing more than a mere system of ethics, such a system surely might have been produced at an infinitely less expence. The long chain of prophecy, the labours of apostles, the blood

of saints, to say nothing of the great and costly sacrifice which the gospel records, might surely have been spared. Lessons of mere human virtue might have been delivered by some suitable instrument of human wisdom, strengthened by the visible authority of human power. A bare system of morals might have been communicated to mankind with a more reasonable prospect of advantage, by means not so repugnant to human pride. A mere scheme of conduct might have been delivered, with far greater probability of success, by Antoninus the emperor, or Plato the philosopher, than by Paul the tent-maker, or Peter the fisherman.

Christianity, then, must be embraced entirely, if it be received at all. It must be taken, without mutilation, as a perfect scheme, in the way in which God has been pleased to reveal it. It must be accepted, not as exhibiting beautiful parts, but as presenting one consummate whole, of which the perfection arises from coherence and dependence, from relation and consistency. Its power will be weakened, and its energy destroyed, if every caviller pulls out a pin, or obstructs a spring, with the presumptuous view of new modelling the divine work, and making it go to his own mind. There is no breaking this system into portions of which we are at liberty to choose one, and reject another. There is no separating the evidences from the doctrines, the doctrines

from the precepts, belief from obedience, morality from piety, the love of our neighbour from the love of God. If we profess christianity at all, if we allow the Divine Author to be indeed unto us "wisdom and righteousness," he must be also "sanctification and redemption."

Christianity, then, is assuredly something more than a mere set of rules; and piety, though it never pretended to be the substitute for a good life, is indispensably necessary to its acceptance with God. The Gospel never offers to make religion supersede morality, but every where clearly proves that morality is not the whole of religion. Piety is not only necessary as a *means*, but is itlelf a most important *end*. It is not only the best principle of moral conduct, but is an indispensable and absolute duty in itself. It is not only the highest motive to the practice of virtue, but is a prior obligation; and absolutely necessary, even when detached from its immediate influence on practical goodness. Religion will survive all the virtues of which it is the source; for we shall be living in the noblest exercises of piety, when we shall have no objects on which to exercise many human virtues. When there will be no distress to be relieved, no injuries to be forgiven, no evil habits to be subdued; there will be a Creator to be blessed and adored, a Redeemer to be loved and praised.

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